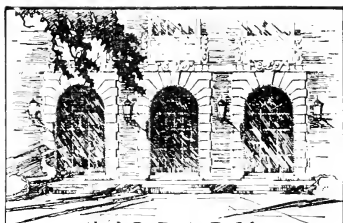


THE HOUSE OF THE BISHOP

by John Galsworthy

with Illustrations

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THE SOUL OF THE BISHOP.

THE SOUL OF THE BISHOP.

A Novel.

BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER,

AUTHOR OF

"BOOTLES' BABY," "CAVALRY LIFE," "ARMY SOCIETY,"
"BEAUTIFUL JIM," "MIGNON'S SECRET," "DINNA FORGET,"
"BUTTONS," "THE OTHER MAN'S WIFE," "GOOD-BYE,"
"MRS. BOB," "ONLY HUMAN," "THREE GIRLS,"
"MY GEOFF," "A SOLDIER'S CHILDREN,"
"AUNT JOHNNIE," ETC.

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THE SOUL OF THE BISHOP.



THE SOUL OF THE BISHOP.

CHAPTER I.

AND WHAT ELSE ?

There is always a hope, in the storm or the calm ;
There is always a hope, and a comforting balm.

—SHIRLEY HIBBERD.

How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in
pieces with words ?

—*Job.*

THE Bishop and Cecil Constable had, however, reckoned altogether without their host. As soon as she broke the news that the wedding was to be put off until the end of July, a perfect storm of inquisitive questions broke upon her devoted head. She first had to deal with her father, who,

when she hinted at the new order of things, stared at her in undisguised amazement, as if he could not have heard her aright.

"You have put your wedding off?" he said incredulously.

"For a little time, dear," said Cecil, trying to speak calmly.

"But why—why?"

"Well, dear, I wished to put it off."

"Yes, but you must have had a reason?"

"Well, dear, you see, Archie can only take a fortnight at the very outside now, and I felt that I would like to have a longer honeymoon than that, and if we wait until the end of July, he can get a couple of months."

"That's all nonsense," said Sir Edward, with decision, "no girl ever put her wedding off for such a reason as that; there's something else behind it."

"Well, I tell you frankly, Father, that it does weigh on my mind coming back so soon to be the wife of the Bishop. It is all so sudden to me and so much will be expected of me, and I am sure I should get more used to being married to Archie if we had a couple of months abroad."

"And what else is there?" said Sir Edward, looking straight at her.

Cecil's colour faded a little.

"I don't think, dear," she said, with gentle reproach, "that it's nice of you or generous of you to insist that there is something else. It sounds almost as if you were anxious to be rid of me."

"Not at all—not in the least—I never want to be rid of you and you know it, you young minx, as well as I do," he exclaimed, with affectionate scolding. "Only your words made me a little suspicious. I don't want to have you hold yourself to an engagement, from a scruple of conscience,

if you would rather not fulfil it. I have always thought," Sir Edward went on, "that the most foolish thing any man or woman could do in this world, is to ratify an engagement as a question of honour; the law of breach-of-promise ought to be revised—there should be no such thing. If any man or woman has made a mistake, it is better to find it out before marriage, than afterwards. I feel very strongly on the subject," he said decidedly.

He was standing in front of the fire, his hands in his pockets, and he looked very determined and almost fierce.

"My dearest old Daddy," said Cecil, looking at him with shining eyes, "you mistake the situation altogether. I haven't got that particular scruple troubling my conscience, and I don't want to get out of my marriage with the Bishop. I think I almost worship him, and I am sure I never thought it possible that I could love any

man so much, and it is perhaps because I love him so dearly, that I am not eager to rush on our marriage. You may think it is very queer, dear, but don't you get it into your head that I am not absolutely happy in my relations with him."

She rose from the table, where she had eaten very little in the way of breakfast, and went and stood close beside him.

"Dear Daddy," she said, putting her slender hands upon his shoulders, "how could I be anything else than over head and ears in love with such a man?"

"Well, it doesn't seem to me natural that you are not enough in love to want to marry him at once. I can tell you I should have looked very much askance at your mother, if she had proposed putting off our marriage for three months."

"Well, so he did," said Cecil, trying to smile.

"I dare say he did," returned Sir

Edward, in a tone of conviction, "for there is no doubt about his feelings, my dear."

"Oh, no, nor of mine," she rejoined quickly.

"Well, as to yours, I tell you frankly, child, that I have had my doubts about yours for some weeks past. You don't look to me like a girl engaged to the man of her heart, you look anxious and worried and ill. I've watched you, when you thought I was otherwise occupied, and I know perfectly well—as least, I am as sure as I can be of anything that I can only guess at—that you have not told me everything. There is something in the background that you are keeping from me. However, I have never tried to force your confidence and I never mean to do so. Of course, you know, Cecil, that I never, until this splendid Bishop came among us, contemplated the possibility of a child of mine

marrying a clergyman. Personally, all I want is that you shall have your highest happiness ; but, remember this, if ever you feel that the bond is one likely to be irksome to you or not in every sense according to your liking, don't let any false scruple of honour bind you. I am perfectly certain that the Bishop would rather die a thousand deaths than marry a woman who did not give him her whole heart."

"I have given him that for all time," said Cecil solemnly.

All the same, she went about her usual avocations with the feeling that she had not in reality hidden the truth from her father. He had perceived that something was amiss between her and Archibald Netherby, he had not only perceived it but he had put it into plain language and she had not been altogether able to deny it, or rather she had not attempted to do so ; she had only reiterated the assurance

of the intensity of her feelings towards him.

Her father pressed her no further. He had supreme confidence in his daughter's judgment and, as she was evidently not willing to discuss the question in its entirety, he was willing if not quite content to await her explanations. On the other hand, no one else who knew her well enough to mention the subject at all, was as easily put off as he who had surely the most right to question and speak, and the most right to her confidence. Lady Vivian heard the news about a week later, at a dinner-party.

"But Miss Constable is not going to be married until July," said a lady, hearing her speak of something relative to the wedding, as if it were to take place soon after Easter.

Lady Vivian looked up with her grandest air. She had a very dignified manner,

bland and urbane but with the decided accents of one accustomed to command, and likely to have the best and latest information on any subject on which she chose to speak with authority.

"The Bishop and Miss Constable are to be married soon after Easter," she said.

"No, July—the end of July," said the other.

Lady Vivian smiled.

"The week after Easter," she repeated.

"But it is put off," said the other lady, "it has been put off—it is to take place at the end of July."

"I have not heard of it," said Lady Vivian, still unconvinced.

"I assure you that it is so."

"I think I should have heard of it," in a more unbelieving tone still.

"Well, I have very good authority," said the younger woman.

"My dear Mrs. Wrothesley, I think I

have as good authority on that subject as anybody in this neighbourhood, and the last time I saw Miss Constable, which was about a fortnight ago, she spoke of the marriage as being fixed to take place during the week after Easter. I don't think one can have better authority as to the date of a marriage than the bride herself."

"No, no, in a general way, of course not," said Mrs. Wrothesley, in an unmoved tone, "but my authority is somewhat better, as I happened to see Sir Edward Constable yesterday and he told me that it was put off until the end of July."

"Indeed—is that so? Then I must beg your pardon, I had not heard of it—you surprise me very much. Did Sir Edward give you any reason?"

"No, he did not—at least, he said it had been put off in deference to his daughter's wishes and that for his own part, he was

very glad of the respite, as he did not want to get rid of her a day sooner than need be."

"I can quite believe that," said Lady Vivian.

She went home with a vague sense of uneasiness.

"I don't like this wedding being put off," she said to Sir Thomas, as they were nearing home, "I don't like put-off weddings—they're not lucky. There is something wrong about it. Why should Cecil want to put her wedding off? They have nothing to wait for. I—I shall go over to-morrow and see her."

"I shouldn't," said Sir Thomas, who was sleepy, and thought that young ladies ought to manage their own matrimonial affairs without the help of outsiders, "I shouldn't; she won't thank you."

"It is not quite a question of her thank-

ing me, Tom, I—I want to know the reason why.”

“Oh, that’s it, is it? Well, my dear, don’t worry about it; you will get to know the reason why, all in good time, and if you don’t, why time will show—time will show.”

Lady Vivian, however, was not to be put off like this. She ordered the carriage, the following afternoon, for three o’clock, and she went over to Raburn, determined to get at the bottom of the mystery. But of course, it is one thing to determine to do a certain thing and it is quite another thing to do it. Lady Vivian had to return no wiser than she went. Miss Constable was not at home.

“Is Miss Constable not receiving or is she out?” Lady Vivian asked.

“Miss Constable is out, my lady,” Matthew replied. “She has gone to Wenderby with the Bishop.”

“Oh—Oh—Well, tell her that I came, say that I wanted to see her very much. I shall be at home to-morrow afternoon, if she is anywhere in my neighbourhood. I want to see her very much.”

“I’ll tell Miss Constable, my lady,” said Matthew, “but I believe she is going somewhere to-morrow afternoon with his Lordship. I heard,” he went on, with the respectful familiarity of an old retainer, “I heard Miss Constable making arrangements for to-morrow. His Lordship dined here last night—not a party, my lady, no other visitors.”

“Oh, I see. Well, give my love to Miss Constable, and tell her that I hope she will come and see me as soon as she can. I have not seen her for a long time.”

“I will, my lady,” said Matthew deferentially.

He repeated the message to Cecil, when she and the Bishop returned from their drive.

“Oh! Oh, yes, thank you, Matthew. And now let us have some tea,” she said pleasantly.

As the door closed behind the old servant, she turned and looked at the Bishop.

“Oh—oh, Archie,” she cried, “it is so easy to see what that means.”

“Why—what does it mean?”

“She has heard,” said Cecil, slipping down on to the fur rug dejectedly. “She’s a dear, an angel, the kindest woman in Blankshire, but she always wants to be at the bottom of everything, she wants to know now why we are not going to be married until July.”

“She can’t put such a question plainly to you,” said the Bishop, who stood in no awe of Lady Vivian.

“Oh, can’t she?” said Cecil drily. “That only shows how much you know about our dear friend. Can’t she? Why, she not only would not mind putting such

a question to me, but she wouldn't hesitate to put it to you. Now she has only known you since you came to Blankhampton, but she has known me all my life. If she cannot get the information she wants out of me, or if I keep out of her way, she will certainly manage to get it out of you."

"I don't think so," said the Bishop, "I don't think so. You give our dear friend the credit of a great deal more acumen than she possesses. She will be a very clever woman, if she discusses that question with me."

"Why, if she puts the question plump and plain to you, what would you say? What could you say?"

"I would tell her politely and with my most episcopal air to mind her own business," said the Bishop promptly. "I would put on my robes, so to speak, and my ruffles, and my hood, I would even, if necessary, put on my mitre; and I would

defy Lady Vivian or anybody else to ask me any personal questions, if I had donned my mitre."

"My dear—Bishop," said Miss Constable smiling, "pray don't take it into your episcopal head, that your episcopal manner, or your episcopal robes, no, nor even your episcopal mitre itself, will save you from the cross-examination that you are bound to undergo at our dear Lady Vivian's hands. My dear boy, she is the kindest soul in the world, it would be impossible to overrate her extreme kindness, her tenderness of heart, her overwhelming love towards all humanity, especially the humanity of her own set; but when, dear woman, she has started her mind on a certain course, nothing, not even Bishops, would stop her. Don't flatter yourself, for a moment, that this particular Bishop will do so. You see," she added, "*I—know Lady Vivian.*"

CHAPTER II.

CROSS-QUESTIONS AND CROOKED ANSWERS.

He that will have a cake out of the wheat
Must tarry the grinding.

SHAKESPEARE.

The words of a tale-bearer are as wounds.

Proverbs.

A FEW days later Miss Constable dutifully went over to Ingleby, and called upon her good friend and neighbour who was the chatelaine of that charming mansion. Not a little to her joy, Lady Vivian was out, had indeed gone into Blankhampton to do some shopping and to pay some calls.

“Oh, I am sorry,” said Cecil, which was a distinct perversion of the truth, because she was indeed very glad, “do tell Lady

Vivian that I am so sorry to have missed her and to have missed her the other day when she called upon me."

"I believe her ladyship will be at home to-morrow," said the servant, fully believing in Miss Constable's professions of regret.

"Ah, but I cannot come to-morrow—I am rather occupied just now—but pray tell Lady Vivian how very sorry I am to have missed her."

It seemed really as if Lady Vivian was fated not to get at the truth about the changes in the date of the Bishop's marriage. On all hands she heard the news, and as many times as she heard it, just so many times did she hear a fresh reason for its having been put off.

"I always said that Cecil Constable didn't care a button about the Bishop," she heard Lady Alice Wynnard say one day, "how was it likely that she could, a girl like Cecil, who had done nothing but

hunt and dance and play tennis and generally enjoy herself? Was it likely she would ever *really* take to a Bishop, however well-born and however good-looking he happened to be?"

"Oh, she's devoted to him," exclaimed Monica Beaumont, a cousin of Lady Alice's. "I'm sure the very way she looks at him is enough to tell that."

"She's put off her marriage, all the same," rejoined Lady Alice drily.

"But she gives a very good reason," said Monica Beaumont, quickly. "She has scarcely had time to get her things ready——"

"Nonsense."

"And she wants to go on a long tour, rather than going straight back to the Palace. Honestly, I think she is quite wise; after all, being engaged must be the best part of it all."

"You have heard that Cecil Constable's

engagement is put off?" said Lady Lucifer, half-an-hour later.

"Oh, yes," poor Lady Vivian answered. "Do you know why?"

"Not I. I have not the least notion. I heard it in—oh, well, I heard it the other day in Roxby and I saw Cecil two days after and of course I asked her why and as she rather shut me up, I didn't pursue the subject any further; but I saw them driving together yesterday, and certainly she looked radiant. The last time I saw her to speak to I thought she was looking excessively ill, but she was certainly looking radiant when I saw her driving with the Bishop."

"I daresay it had something to do with his engagements," said Lady Vivian, who never encouraged the gratification of curiosity in other people.

Quite a fortnight elapsed after this before Lady Vivian drove over to Raburn and

was so fortunate as to find Miss Constable at home and alone.

“How glad I am not to have missed you again,” she said, in her most motherly tones.

“Dear Lady Vivian,” said Cecil, going to meet her. She knew, of course, pretty well what was coming.

Lady Vivian complained a little of the east wind, and complimented Cecil on the pleasant warmth of her room, said she should be glad of a cup of tea, and when Cecil had poured it out and had generally ministered to her, she let fly the original bombshell which was the exact cause of her visit.

“I hear you have put off your marriage, Cecil,” she remarked, in a casual tone, much as she would have spoken of the putting off of the date of a journey for a few days.

“Yes,” Cecil answered.

"I have heard it everywhere," Lady Vivian went on, stirring her tea, reflectively. "At first I could not believe it, because I had seen you so short a time before, and you had given me no hint that you were even thinking of such a thing."

"I don't know that I had thought of it then," Cecil answered.

"But, my dear, why—why, do you do it?" her ladyship asked bluntly.

"We put it off," Cecil answered, "because it was more convenient to us to do so."

"More convenient? What on account of the Bishop's engagements? Ah, that was what Violet Lucifer said. I wonder you did not think of that before."

"The fact is," said Cecil, "that before the Bishop asked me to marry him at all, he had fixed all his engagements down to the 8th of July, and he could only take ten days or a fortnight if we were married at

Easter and I much prefer to go away for a longer time than that. If I were going to a strange neighbourhood, I don't know that I should have minded a short honeymoon ; but coming back to live in Blankshire, so short a distance from home, and under such different circumstances, I much preferred to be away for a longer time and, therefore, we are going to be married at the end of July and shall be away for two months."

"You are quite sure, Cecil," said Lady Vivian, determined to get to the bottom of what to her seemed to be a mystery, "that you are making no mistake in this marriage?"

"Mistake?" said Cecil. She turned a little red, as well she might, knowing all that lay between her and the Bishop. "Why, what do you mean?"

"Well, you are quite sure you are as much attached to the Bishop as you thought?"

"A great deal more so," said Cecil unhesitatingly.

"Of course, he must be more so too."

"I have not seen any signs of his wanting to get out of it," said Cecil, trying to turn the whole conversation into a joke.

"No, dear, I don't suppose he would try to get out of it, even if——"

"Even if he did not care a button about me," said Cecil.

"Well, dear, I was not going to put it in that way—but, of course, the Bishop is a man of honour."

"I don't think it is a question of honour with him," said she.

"You are quite sure you have no doubt yourself, dear?" Lady Vivian went on, pursuing the subject with relentless persistency.

Cecil started as if she had been shot.

"Doubts—what made you say that?"

“I meant that you do really care for him?”

“Oh, dear, yes, of course. I shouldn’t marry him if I didn’t care for him—I would not marry any man if I didn’t care for him. What should I marry him for?”

“Well—position for one thing.”

“Oh, his position is no better than mine—neither his position of birth nor his official position. I should have thought,” she added, a little disdainfully, “that even in Blankhampton, I should be free from such a suspicion as that. But there, one never knows what people may think nor how foolish they may be. But I do wish,” she went on, a little vexedly, “that people would leave me and the Bishop to manage our own affairs and to mind our own business. What can it matter to anybody, when one marries or for what reason? If a woman likes to marry for position, that is her business; if she likes to marry

for love, that is her business too; it can make no difference to anybody else."

"I think, my dear child," said Lady Vivian kindly, and not in the least taking a word of Cecil's vexed comment to herself, "I think that everybody who is really nice, takes an interest in the marriages of those whom they know, it is only kindly and pleasant for people to do so, not by any means interfering or anything of that kind. For instance now, *I* take the greatest possible interest in you and the dear Bishop; in you because you are you, and in the Bishop, because he is the Bishop and we respect him and like him; and because we wish him to be married happily and suitably, both for his sake and for yours."

"Oh, yes, yes—don't think me ungracious," cried Cecil, with some contrition, "but you really don't know how I have been badgered these last few days. People

seem to think because we have decided to put our marriage off for a few weeks, that there is something dreadfully wrong between us. If it were so, it would be bad enough without being worried about it by everyone else. And it is not always easy to discuss your most private affairs and your most sacred feelings, even with your most intimate friends—I am sure it is better to let people worry through their affairs, and even their troubles, without bothering them one way or another.”

“It’s not the kindest way,” said Lady Vivian.

“Well, I don’t know; neglect *is* sometimes the kindest,” Cecil answered.

There were many times during the next few weeks, when Miss Constable wished with all her heart, that she could have married the Bishop, leaving doctrinal questions to take care of themselves.

“If only you had not been a Bishop,”

she exclaimed vexedly to him on the evening of Lady Vivian's visit, "if only you had not been a Bishop, we could have got married and it would not have mattered—I mean, it would not have mattered so much, whether I accepted or denied certain things, we could have agreed to differ on those points. And then people would not have been able to talk as they do now; they have actually got some tale afloat that I am marrying you for your position."

"Not really?"

"Yes, really. Of course, I know it is a fine thing to be a Bishop, but, after all, Archie, in spite of your episcopal robes and your episcopal manner, we stand on an equality, you and I."

"Perfectly so. But, my dearest," he said soothingly, "why do you worry about these dear people? People will talk, they have talked ever since the world began, and they will talk as long as the world lasts.

It is human nature to talk. If you and I were not so wrapped up in our own affairs, we should talk probably more or less about other people's. As for me, I am always interfering in other people's business. Before I came to Blankhampton, I was the recipient of all the troubles, and joys, and woes, and pleasures, and anxieties of a good half of the people in my parish ; in fact, I got so used to dealing with other people's affairs, rather than with my own, that, at last, I got to feel that it was absolutely wrong to spend a little time managing my own business. In our case now, I only wish that you would consent to let the future take care of itself. It would be so much the wiser course, because I am afraid, dearest, that even these three months will not serve to satisfy your mind and your very anxiety to bring your thoughts to a certain issue will only tend to prevent any settlement in your mind.

As it is now, you must feel that your inclinations press you one way and your doubts direct you another, therefore you cannot honestly fix upon one side or another; whereas, if the irrevocable step were taken, you could then do exactly as your reason best dictated."

"Yes, that is true," she answered. "But I don't think that you—even you—can understand my feverish anxiety to believe what my reason tells me is perfectly impossible."



CHAPTER III.

A NINE DAYS' WONDER.

Life is always a meeting and a parting !

A glimpse into the world of "might have been."

—GERALD MASSEY.

The heart knoweth its own bitterness.

—*Proverbs.*

SEVERAL weeks went by. The little buzz of wonder and gossip about the postponement of the Bishop's marriage to Miss Constable died out, as such nine days' wonders do. Blankhampton people held very much to their original opinions, and it must be confessed that very few of them indeed believed in the story of the bride-elect's desire to have a longer honeymoon than she could have had, had the wedding taken

place at Easter. Their common-sense told them that no bride would ever put a wedding off for such a reason.

So Easter came and went, and still Blankhampton people were hugely puzzled. That there was nothing wrong between the Bishop and his fiancée they were at times quite sure, at such times, indeed, as they happened to see them together, when Miss Constable always looked radiance and happiness personified. At other times, when they saw her alone, they told each other not only that she was not happy in her approaching marriage, but that she was, from some cause or other, breaking her heart.

“I wonder,” said one Blankhampton woman to another, “that the Bishop himself doesn’t see it. She looks ghastly. It is a very bad compliment to such a match as he is.”

“Oh, but have you see them together?”

They are perfectly wrapped up in each other."

"I know they seem so. Look at her now," said the first speaker, turning her eyes towards Cecil, who was on the other side of the room.

"Yes, I know—I know. But, all the same, she does not look like that when she is with him; indeed, you would hardly know her for the same girl."

"She looks miserable enough now," said the other in a tone of conviction.

"Poor thing, yes. I wonder what it is? Perhaps she is overwhelmed with the responsibility of the situation."

"Oh, I don't see why she should be. Mrs. Cottenham was never overwhelmed with the responsibilities of her situation as a Bishop's wife."

"No; but she had been married a long time before he was made a bishop. She didn't marry him as a bishop.

which does make a difference, you know."

"Yes, perhaps it does."

The sentimental Maria perhaps entered into Miss Constable's real feelings more truly than any of those who knew her personally. It happened that the languishing lady was in the principal jeweller's shop in St. Thomas's Street, having gone for the purpose of buying herself a new watch, for which she had been saving up for a long time. And while she was standing by the counter with all the watches spread out before her on their velvet-covered trays, Miss Constable's little cart stopped at the door of the shop. She came in a moment later and approached the counter at which the sentimental Maria was standing.

"Oh, Mr. Ward," she said in her pleasant well-modulated tones, "I fancy one of these opals is a little loose. I would like you to look at it.

She drew her glove off her left hand and, slipping off the opal ring which the Bishop had given her, handed it to the jeweller.

"It should not be loose, Miss Constable," he said, as he took it from her. "It is one of our own setting, and I particularly tested it before it was sent home to you. But opals are rather tricky stones to manage. However, it can be put right in a few minutes."

He screwed a glass into his eye and turned to the light that he might the better examine the ring.

The sentimental Maria's keen eyes marked its beauty and she wondered whether Miss Constable had been an October child or not. From the ring her eyes wandered to its owner's face. She was standing with her arms resting on the rather high glass-covered counter, carelessly looking down upon the contents of the cases below. Maria noted what a

pretty hand she had. A slender hand and white, without being at all sickly looking. She noted, too, the lustrous half-hoop of diamonds upon the third finger and realised, in a moment, that the opals had not been her engagement ring.

“One of the stones is a little loose, Madam,” said Mr. Ward, coming back to the counter again, “but it is a mere trifle, I’ll have it put right in a few minutes. Are you remaining in the town for any time?”

“No,” she answered, “I am going straight home—I am on my way home now. It does not matter, Mr. Ward, I’ll wait till it is done. I will look at these pretty things here.”

She made a little movement of her hand as if to excuse him from attending her, and he turned back to wait upon the sentimental Maria.

“I have another watch which I should

particularly like you to see," he said to her. "If you will excuse me for a moment, I will fetch it."

And Maria excused him, saying that she was in no hurry, which was true; moreover, she was very well entertained in taking notes of Miss Constable. Not because she was Miss Constable, but because of the proprietary interest which she still permitted herself to feel in the Bishop to whom Miss Constable was engaged to be married.

Miss Constable was wearing a light tan-coloured driving-coat, made with several capes and very big buttons; and she wore a little red velvet hat upon her soft dark hair. To Maria she looked the essence of refinement and good breeding, but she noticed that her face was set in sad, almost stern lines, and that the shadows under her eyes were very dark and deep.

"How ill she looks," the sentimental

Maria thought. "Poor girl, she is overwhelmed with the responsibilities of her new life."

Instinctively Maria knew very much what Miss Constable was feeling, by her knowledge of what she herself would have felt had she been placed in her present situation; indeed, it gave her something like a throb at the heart, even to think of another's marriage with the man who was her secret hero and the object of her most ardent admiration.

Presently the jeweller returned.

"The watch will be ready in a moment, Madam," he said in an undertone. "The fact is, in showing it the other day, I broke one of the hands and it is being put on; if you don't mind waiting a minute or so, it will show to better advantage than without it."

"Oh, I don't mind at all," said Maria, with a little gush of feeling that if Miss

Constable did not mind waiting neither need she.

There was a moment's silence, during which the jeweller divided wordless attentions between his two customers. It was Miss Constable who broke the silence.

"That's a pretty thing, Mr. Ward," she said, pointing to something in the case under the counter.

"That cameo with the pearls, Madam?" he asked.

"Yes, I should like to see it."

He opened the back of the case and took out the tray upon which the cameo was lying among a quantity of other trinkets.

"It is not new," she remarked.

"Oh, no, Madam, quite an antique. I took it in exchange some years ago."

"Really? Is it expensive?"

"No, Madam, not for what it is. I never make very much on these trinkets. It is five pounds ten."

“Oh! I think I will have it. I have not seen anything so pretty for a long time. I will take it with me. But I have no money—at least, I have only a few shillings in my pocket.”

Mr. Ward, however, expressed himself absolutely indifferent upon the question of money; indeed, one might have imagined from his deprecating airs and looks that he would rather not be paid for anything that he parted with in the ordinary way of business; but that is the way of a good many tradespeople, until *you* have done the deed.

“What is that?” she asked, taking in her ungloved hand, a little coral charm.

“I don’t know that it is anything particular, Madam,” he answered. “I came by that in the same way. Indeed, most of the articles in this tray are what I have taken in exchange for more modern things. The lady from whom I took that told me

that she had brought it from Naples and that she had picked it up there in a little shop in a back street. I wondered that she was willing to part with it. It is very interesting—but though a good many ladies have looked at it, nobody has cared to buy it. You see, Miss Constable, charms have gone out of fashion lately.”

“Yes, I suppose they have,” said Cecil. “But it is very pretty. Such things ought never to go out.”

The charm was a tiny *Agnus Dei* in coral, with a band of gold about its girth, so that it could hang by a little ring in the middle of its back.

“How much is it?” she asked

“Oh, quite reasonable, Madam; thirty-five shillings.”

“I will have that too,” she said. “And now, put the tray away or else I shall be wanting something else.”

“Would you like these in separate

boxes?" said Mr. Ward, as he shut the back of the case with a click.

"Yes—no—yes, you may as well put them in boxes. I think that antique ought to have a case—you ought to give me a case for that."

"I will, Madam, with pleasure," he answered, "and here is your ring. I don't think the stones will come loose again."

At that moment, the Bishop walked into the shop. Miss Constable looked up, her colour rising and a sudden flood of radiance lighting up her face.

"Oh, is that you!" she exclaimed. "I did not expect to see you this afternoon."

"No, nor I. But I was on my way from the station and I saw your cart at the door."

"I have been buying you a present," she said, holding up the little charm. "I also bought one for myself but, of course, that does not count."

“Then I think that I ought to buy one for you,” said the Bishop, looking at her with all his soul in his eyes. “This is very charming, Mr. Ward, I didn’t know you had anything so precious in your stock.”

“Well, you see, my lord,” said Mr. Ward smirking, “you don’t take very much interest in these vanities—at least not for yourself.”

“Well, I don’t know so much about that,” answered the Bishop, “I like pretty things as well as anybody. If you are going to give me that now, I will have it put on my watch-chain at once. I am delighted with it.”

It was as good as a play to the sentimental Maria ; but from that moment, she regarded the Bishop in a totally new light. She had thought of him as being always in the episcopal robes and with his episcopal manner ; she had never dreamed of him as an ordinary person, as a man who could

look delighted and wax quite enthusiastic over a coral charm.

“Why, what has happened to your ring?” he asked, seeing her slip it on her finger again.

“Oh, nothing much. One of the stones was a little loose, that was all,” she replied. “I thought I had better get it put right.”

“I believe that that ring is thoroughly unlucky,” said the Bishop, resting his arms on the glass-topped counter, and looking at Miss Constable with a proud and well-satisfied look. The sentimental Maria gasped. The idea of a Bishop talking of anything being lucky or unlucky was a revelation to her. Miss Constable, however, only laughed.

“You had better exchange it for something else,” he went on. “Now, you were a December child, so you ought to wear turquoises; they would bring you good luck. And besides that, they are much

prettier than opals, which always give me an uncanny sort of feeling. They're so like eyes that have got cataract upon them."

The sentimental Maria nearly had a fit. For the first time, she thoroughly blamed the Bishop's bride-elect in her heart, for instead of submitting instantly to have her opals changed for turquoises, she remarked obstinately that she would prefer to keep them, and that if he wanted to give her a turquoise ring, he could do so.

"I suppose you have turquoise rings, Mr. Ward?" said the Bishop.

Mr. Ward replied that he had.

But Cecil interposed, with a courteous gesture towards the sentimental Maria.

"No, Mr. Ward, this lady came before me; I cannot keep her waiting while I choose anything else. Please, do attend to her first."

The sentimental Maria almost wept as she declared that time was of no con-

sequence to her whatever, and that she would have had to wait just as long, had there been nobody else in the shop. The Bishop, however, took off his hat and gravely insisted that they could not be served before her, and Mr. Ward called one of his assistants to hand out all the turquoise rings of which he was possessed, and himself attended to the flushed and excited lady, who was so intensely interested by the little romantic comedy which had so unexpectedly laid itself before her.

However, Maria did not lose any of the play. Before she had fully made up her mind as to the choice of a watch, Miss Constable had chosen a beautiful ring, a half hoop of turquoises. She put it on her finger there and then, as she laughingly said, for luck between the diamonds and the opals. Then the Bishop took off his watch and chain that the charm, just

presented to him by his *fiancée*, might be attached thereto. Mr. Ward's assistant suggested that the charm certainly would be the better for a rub up ; and, receiving the Bishop's assent, disappeared with it into the back premises. The Bishop and Miss Constable remained at the counter talking together, but although the sentimental Maria's attention was supposed to be occupied by the jeweller and the watches, yet like the weazel, which sleeps with one eye open, she managed to keep an ear unoccupied for the receipt of their conversation.

"You are coming out to Raburn to-night?" she heard Miss Constable say in familiar undertone.

"Yes, I intended to do so."

"What a pity you can't come back with me," she went on.

"So I will if you like, that is if you think your cart will bear me."

"Oh, I think it will carry you ; it carries

William occasionally and William weighs seventeen stones."

"Who is William?" asked the Bishop.

"Oh, William is the stately person, who presides over our stables. He comes one in precedence of Matthew, and poor dear Father cannot call his soul his own when William's word has gone forth. Indeed, I am the only person of whom William stands in any awe; and I think that William's awe of me consists mainly in the fact that I had the unparalleled audacity to be born a girl, when I ought to have been born a boy. He considers if I had nerve enough to do that, I should have nerve enough to snap his head off, if I felt like it. Once or twice he has borrowed my cart when something has happened to his own; but I always lend it on condition that if it is broken, it is repaired out of the ordinary stable expenses and not as a smash of mine.

But tell me, if you come back with me how will you get home?"

"Well, unless I send a note up to the Palace to tell them to send for me, I couldn't get home," the Bishop answered.

"I tell you what we will do," said Miss Constable, "I will send my boy up to the Palace with a message from you, and he can come back with your carriage. Then I think my cart will just manage to hold you," laughing again.

"Very well; then that is what we will do. You won't mind my not being dressed, will you?"

"Oh no, that is one of the advantages of being a Bishop," she said smiling, "you always look presentable. Now here is your watch and chain back again."

The Bishop put the chain on and admired himself a little, and finally they went out of the shop with kindly farewells, attended by the jeweller to the edge of the curb.

The sentimental Maria went home, and pondered in the loneliness of her virtuous domicile upon the inner life of a man of such standing as the Bishop of Blankhampton. I will not pretend that the incident had not been somewhat of a shock to her. To hear such a man told that he always looked presentable. To hear such a man chaffed a little about the likelihood of the cart's breaking down under his weight. To hear him told, in that joking way, of the advantages of being a Bishop—as if there could be any *disadvantages* to that illustrious position.

“She is very fond of him,” said Maria to herself more than once, “how different she looked when he came in, to what she looked before. And yet, there is something. No girl who was perfectly happy, could look so sad as she did. She is happy and she isn't happy ; she looks to me as if she was breaking her heart.”

CHAPTER IV.

CALM DISCUSSION.

Strong son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace.
Believing when we cannot prove !

—TENNYSON.

Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart.

—*Kings.*

Now during all this time, the Bishop was exceedingly considerate and good to his *fiancée*, whose storm-tossed mind seemed in no way to be drawing nearer to a haven of possible belief. Had he reverted much to the cause by which their marriage had been put off, I think she would have broken down altogether ; but, as it was, he

never so much as hinted at the disturbed state in which he knew her mind to be.

As soon as Easter had gone by, the whole neighbourhood seemed to rouse itself into a perfect epidemic of dinner giving, and on all these solemnly festive occasions, the Bishop and Miss Constable were made to feel themselves the principal guests. Cecil had always been a person of considerable importance in Blankshire but now for the time being at least, she found herself in the position of being the most important woman in the entire county. With every day it seemed as if the Bishop's personal popularity increased, and although with every day her love for him grew stronger, yet so did her want of faith in those tenets which to him were essential, both in this world and the next, grow more and more confirmed. She was very unhappy.

May went over and June came in.

Whenever the Bishop preached within reasonable distance of Blankhampton Cecil Constable was to be seen among the congregation, but I do not think that his sermons helped her in the smallest. They were sermons that would have helped most people anxious for help in the ordinary every-day current of life, but, like most advanced thinkers, the Bishop was not great on doctrinal points.

He was not in any sense an argumentative preacher. With him, if the truth be told, the beautiful life was infinitely of more importance than the cut and dried faith. Had he been either an extreme High church or an extreme Low churchman, he would have been better able to argue her out of the position in which she found herself. But, you see, the Bishop was neither High nor Low ; he was of that moderate advanced section, which shelters itself, its inconsistencies, behind its works, so

much at variance with its attested faith, its many improvements on the original scheme of episcopal Christianity, which calls itself Broad. In ordinary every-day life, your Broad churchman is wonderfully clever at letting the question of doctrine alone; in modern language, he lets it slide: and it is only when you bring him up face to face with a plain question, requiring a plain yes, or no, for answer, that you can ever induce him to explain what his faith really is. So far as my experience goes, your Broad churchman swallows the Thirty-nine Articles in a lump, as one tries to swallow a pill without tasting it. He takes them very much as ordinary people take a pill. We know there are all sorts of horrible things in it, but some of them seem to do us good and so we don't enquire too closely into the internal composition of the little sugar-coated globe, which we pop down our throats, leaving the rest to Providence.

It is true that the majority of churchmen of all shades of colour between Ritualists and Evangelicals believe that the general scheme of the Church's constitution is good, that although many of these doctrinal points have become more or less old-fashioned and obsolete (in deed if not in word) yet, taken as a whole, it could not well be improved upon. Most of them believe that any tampering with a constitution which has stood firm during so many years, would do more harm to the general cause of Christianity, as accomplished through the established Church, than a new and possibly more rational order of things would be likely to do good.

It would be worse than foolish of me to pretend that a man, so enlightened, so advanced in Christianity, so pure of purpose, and of so blameless a life as the Bishop of Blankhampton, could believe for one moment that an innocent and uncon-

scious baby dying unbaptised, should suffer the torture of the damned to the end of time. For my own part, I have never yet found a clergyman of the Church of England, who would definitely declare that he believed, in its literal sense, a doctrine so unnecessarily diabolical as this. To an ordinary mind, troubled upon such a point, the Bishop of Blankhampton would have said :

“You must not forget that these Articles were framed in a very hard time, that there was still very much of the eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth theory about the Church fathers of that day. It was still believed in a literal sense that the sins, even the spiritual sins, of the fathers should be visited on the children, not only until the third and fourth generation but unto the end of time—of time which has no end.”

I can scarcely tell you how he longed at

this time to say to her, on this very point :

“Dearest, why trouble your dear little ignorant head on such points as these? Leave it all to me. Let me tell you what to believe. Let me explain to you what interpretation you ought to put on certain portions both of Scripture and of the Church’s Articles.”

But he did not say it, because Cecil was too desperately in earnest. She was too eager and anxious—“If you could only make things clear to me,” she burst out one day, when they had been talking of their future life.

“My dear child, you ought to be sensible enough to understand, you ought to be sufficiently enlightened to be able to read between the lines as it were, you ought to be able to realise that the holy men of those days who framed those Articles, compiled them to the very best of their

belief, but that they were men of limited understanding is, to a certain extent, indisputable. At that time of day, the religious life tended towards narrowness; the old Fathers of the Church had to work by fear rather than by common sense, upon the minds of a people who were guided, as it used to be the fashion to guide children, not through their hearts but through their senses—their senses of touch, feeling, hearing, and sight. In those days, to put the matter into the simplest possible every-day language, those who were devoted to a religious life, had no idea of doing what Christ Himself did, of making the ordinary every-day life and the religious life one. No, their greatest idea of religion was to mortify and punish the flesh, to out-Herod Herod, as it were, in a way of—Oh, forgive me, my dearest, but you ask me for the most every-day language—of piling up the agony. The people were lawless and for

the most part, very ignorant, and minor crimes were frequently punished with death. If a man stole a sheep he was hanged ; if a man set a rick on fire, even by accident, he was hanged ; if he stole a turnip out of a field, it was ten chances to one that he was hanged for it. The whole tone of the age was severe and it was also unbridled. So severity in religion was as unbridled as was severity in the putting down of law-breaking. Therefore, it is not to be wondered at that the Articles of Religion are exceedingly severe in their tone. But to alter these things now would be to lay ourselves open to the scorn of every sect which has dissented from us. You will not find any religion that works with absolute harmony in every particular ; when that religion is found the great work of evangelization will be over, the world will be evangelized. But that will only be at the millennium. You have never heard me say that any

Church or, for the matter of that, our Church, is a perfectly constituted body. There is no such thing as perfection in this world, at least not of corporate perfection. The very best, and purest, and most holy of men and women, may absolutely disagree with the ideas and most carefully cherished plans of others, and the natural friction of disagreement may widen into a bridgeless gulf, without the very slightest fault upon either side. But although I do not hold up the constitution of our Church as being perfect, I do say that it is the best that has ever been built up, that it will last the longest of all the creeds and that it will do more good work than any other form of religion in this country."

"But," cried Cecil, "you preach one thing and you believe another."

"No," he said; "I do not preach it, I accept it. I accept certain points, as being the least of several evils. You know St.

Paul said—I know your objection to texts but this is a simple text which should be at the tip of all tongues—‘All things are lawful but all things are not expedient.’”

“I don’t see,” said Cecil, “what that has to do with the subject in question.”

The Bishop smiled.

“My dear,” he said, “it has everything to do with it. It would be *lawful* for the leading men of the Church to-day, to form themselves into a body and give voice to the general feeling that the point about infant baptism being necessary to salvation, should be eliminated from our Articles of Faith; but it would not be expedient. You know,” he went on, “there are some churches that do not accept that doctrine, there are churches which have made other radical changes from our creed, not because they are anxious to break away from the mother Church, but solely because their minds refused to accept certain things,

which the Church does not see her way to alter. But time has shown that, although those changes have been made, these churches do not work more smoothly, do not give more solid satisfaction to their members, do not accomplish more labour in the human vineyard, than the Mother Church has done and is doing. It is an ascertained fact, it is proved beyond all question of doubt, that you cannot pull any constitution to pieces without doing a vast amount of harm. You can never build it up again to what it was before you began to tamper with the main supports. And so most men and women to-day are contented to treat these Articles to a certain extent as a matter of form, not to be taken literally, word for word, any more than you would take the whole Bible literally word for word, from one end to the other. You could not, knowing me, believe that I could, in its *literal* sense, put

forward the doctrine that Baptism is necessary, literally necessary, to prevent an innocent baby of a few hours' old, being burned for ever till the end of time. Yet it is necessary that children should be baptised."

"I don't see it," said Cecil.

"No, perhaps you do not. That is because you are troubled in your mind, and you have only just begun to think about a subject which needs a lifetime to understand, and you look at it now that you have begun to think about it, from an uneducated, and unskilful and wholly prejudiced point of view."

"But," said Cecil, "there is the fact that the poor baby was buried without any religious service whatever, as the mother put it, buried like a dog; and the vicar of the parish expressed himself deeply grieved to have to deny the mother the consolation of the usual service. And yet, his grief wouldn't allow him to bury the child!"

“Well, in a technical sense”—said the Bishop deprecatingly.

“Technical? But there ought to be no technicality in religion,” she said.

“Well, neither ought there to be, and when we find ourselves gathered together in that heaven, to which most of us are looking, we may be quite sure that there we shall have no technicalities to contend with; but here we do have them and we must put up with them. For my part,” said the Bishop, “when I was in the way of taking funerals, I never asked any questions; I took it for granted that the child had been baptised.”

“That was what our Rector told me,” she cried. “He went further than that; he said ‘When I know that a baby has not been baptised, I always send and ask some other parson to take the service for me; I get out of it that way.’”

“A very sensible man,” said the Bishop.

“But you will never find a whole body of men, of such numbers as the clergy of the Church of England, all endowed with common sense to such a degree as the Rector of Raburn seems to be. As a matter of fact, that is one of the Church’s greatest weaknesses; Bishops are not half particular enough whom they ordain. The standard now is a standard of learning and personal character, but that is not really enough. If I had my way I would to a great extent study personal appearance and manner; and I would make every candidate for ordination pass through a *vivâ voce* examination in every-day common sense. However, I suppose it wouldn’t work,” he added regretfully, “and I am perfectly sure that a certain set would simply howl when the suggestion was put forward. So far as I can see, dearest,” he went on, taking her hands in his and looking at her with great affection,

“your situation practically is this :—being very holy-minded yourself, you do not require to have your plan of life laid out for you, as it has been found necessary to lay out the plan of life or religion, which should be the same thing, for those less ready than you are to take the good road first. If the whole world were like you, a Creed would scarcely be necessary, because in that case everybody would follow the broad teaching of Christ Himself, which is so simple, so admirably clear and so utterly unhampered by technicalities and subjects for doubt. It is because the Fathers of the Church went beyond these simple truths, that such minds as yours are troubled by the apparent inconsistencies or, if you will have it so, the evident inconsistencies in the Church Creed. You know it has always been my belief that it is infinitely better to say too little than too much ; I have found that in every relation of life.

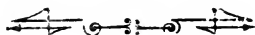
The Fathers of the Church, those who framed the Thirty-nine Articles, erred in explaining a little too far, which is all very well for us, who understand how to make allowances for the differences which four hundred years have made between their ideas and ours, who understand how to lay stress on the broad truths, which no sensible or right minded person can deny or wish to deny and those explanatory details, which must have been perfectly clear to those who put them forward four hundred years ago. I think," he went on, "that if we could frame a new constitution for the Church now, we should frame it more nearly on the actual teaching of Christ than any constitution which has yet been compiled. For instance, if you look at the Baptismal Service, you will find that parents are exhorted to teach their children the Creed—the Creed, meaning of course the Apostles' Creed—the Lord's Prayer

and the Ten Commandments in the vulgar Tongue. Taken broadly, these comprise everything that is necessary for the Christian life. Any man or woman who keeps the Ten Commandments, must of necessity be leading an absolutely good life. Any one who believes in the Apostles' Creed must of equal necessity be believing everything that is essential for the Christian Church; while the Lord's Prayer, which we have straight from the highest Christian authority of all, Christ Himself, is simply the broadest, the simplest and yet the most perfect expression of a religious faith that it is possible for any human being to make. Speaking to you, not as your future husband, not as the man who loves you with his whole heart, but as a clergyman, as a Bishop, I would have you believe that these three, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed, are absolutely sufficient for you to use as land-

marks of faith. All the rest, you may safely put aside and honestly believe that they are as nothing to you."

For some little time Cecil Constable did not speak.

"We won't talk about it any more just now," she said at last, "I would like to think over everything that you have said without any further argument. You have given me more comfort to-day, than I have had ever since those terrible doubts first came into my mind. I would like to think before I say another word."



CHAPTER V.

COULEUR DE ROSE.

“To the tears I have shed and regret not
What matters a few more tears ;
Or a few days waiting longer,
To one that has waited for years ? ”

—OWEN MEREDITH.

“Truly the light is sweet.”

—*Ecclesiastes.*

THE Bishop went away from Raburn that afternoon feeling that, practically speaking, the way was now smooth and clear between his fiancée and himself. Without doubt, he loved her the more for the very attitude of mind which had cost her such acute and keen distress during the past few months. His thoughts went back to that brilliant summer morning, when he

had first set eyes upon her in the choir of the Parish. How well he remembered the scene. The stately edifice with its richness of carving, its priceless old oak, its rare old windows and inlaid reredos, the exquisite music and imposing ritual, all culminating to him in that one eager soul, vainly seeking for satisfaction, as it looked at him through Cecil Constable's beautiful eyes.

He smiled tenderly to himself, as he thought of all that had come about since that day. Of how it had been fated that they should have met soul to soul, as well as face to face. To him, it was as if the past had been ordained, for the mutual society, help and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.

We are all of us in this world, however, prone to believe what we want to believe, and good and wise as the Bishop of

Blankhampton was, he was no exception to the general rule. He *wanted* to believe that Cecil Constable would find her chaotic and troubled thoughts turned into the smooth path of conventional belief, and it was but natural that he should see only rose-lit smooth waters a-head.

Miss Constable herself was in no such happy frame of mind. She sat where he had left her for a long time without moving, thinking over what he had said to her. She knew that, from his point of view, he had been absolutely right in everything that had fallen from his lips. But the point of view was the stumbling-block. She felt he was right in what he had said about those terrible Thirty-nine Articles, that they must be taken in the spirit and not in any sense by the letter. She felt that he was perfectly right in saying that the Church's constitution, though not perfect by any means, had yet

never been improved upon, and that it would never do to tamper with it in these later days. She knew that he had justified himself against her charge of accepting one doctrine and preaching another. And great peace stole into her soul, as she realised, for the first time, that as Archibald Netherby's wife she would have, in the years to come, not more but less temptation to enquire too closely into the whys and wherefores of the faith, in which he believed so implicitly.

She never moved until the the first bell rang for dinner. The Bishop had been gone quite two hours, for he was giving a dinner at the Palace that night to certain important ones among his clergy, many of whom were staying with him. She rose from the wide sofa and seated herself at the inlaid writing-table ; then she opened her blotting-book and wrote a short note :

“DEAREST,” it said,

“I know that you will be busy when you get this, but I must tell you that you have set my mind at rest—I hope for ever.

“Your CECIL.”

She addressed it to the Bishop and rang the bell.

“Oh, Matthew,” she said, when that functionary appeared, “I want you to send Thomas over to the Palace at once with this. He can take my cart, or as William may direct.”

Sir Edward was in town for a few days, whither Cecil had steadfastly refused to accompany him, so that she dined alone. But she was not dull; she was not even lonely. She chatted a little with Matthew, hearing quite a little budget of village news and information, and then she went back to her own sanctum and gave Ruffy a

concert all to himself. In truth, Cecil Constable had not felt so full of peace and happiness for many months.

Her note was put into the Bishop's hand as soon as it arrived at the Palace, for the servant who received it naturally thought that it might be important. The dinner itself was actually over but the gentlemen were still lingering over their dessert.

"The groom does not know if any answer is required, my lord," said the footman.

The Bishop looked up.

"Do you permit me?" he said to his guests, who all conveyed by gestures their desire that he should make the contents of the letter his own.

The effect of the short note acted like magic upon the Bishop, for, as he realised what Cecil had written, and the depth of the affection which could not bear to keep him a moment longer in suspense than

was absolutely necessary, such a flood of joy rushed into his heart, that he almost broke down under it.

“Tell the groom to wait; I will write an answer in a few minutes,” he said, with what calmness he could command; then folded the note and put it away in his breast pocket.

“Pleasant news, I hope, Bishop,” said the Dean of Blankhampton, who sat at his right hand.

“My dear Dean,” said the Bishop, “the best news of any that could have come to me. I was not exactly unhappy when I sat down to this table, but truly, I don’t think that the whole world holds a man more supremely contented with his lot, than I am at this moment.”

“That is good,” said the Dean heartily. “But don’t mind us, if you want to go and write an answer.”

“Thank you very much, I will go and

do it, since you allow me. I shall not be five minutes."

On his way to the study, he had to pass the door of the Chapel, which, as usual, was dimly lighted. It was a beautiful little shrine, carved and gilded and wrought with mosaic and precious stones, with many coloured marbles, and rare old windows, rivalling those of the Parish in beauty. In front of the Altar a lamp always hung and it was the Bishop's wish that it should never be extinguished. He passed in and went straight up to the Altar-rail, when he knelt down; but what his prayer was or what his pæan of praise and thanksgiving, is not for me to tell or for you to hear. It was not long but there are some moments of our lives in which short measure makes over-weight.

Then he went on to the study and wrote literally three lines to his sweetheart :

“Your letter came to me,” he said.
“God be thanked, my darling, is the
prayer of your always devoted

“ARCHIE.”

After this the preparations for the wedding went blithely on. Cecil Constable wrote to her father that night and said “If it will please you, I will come up to town the day after to-morrow, and will stay a few days. I shall not come till the three o’clock train, if you will come or send Badger to meet me. I shall bring Louise. I think you had better send me a wire, as soon as you receive this.”

For the first time for many months she went to sleep the moment she got into bed with the satisfied weariness of a child, a child who has to think about nothing, a child who is not even afraid of bogies. And in the morning when she came down, she looked as the discreet Matthew expressed it

to his friend, the cook, as if a load had been taken off her shoulders.

“ I don’t know what’s come to our young Miss,” he remarked, “ she seems so gay and so happy, and you’d think when Sir Edward’s away and the Bishop had a dinner-party last night, that she would have been dull. But not a bit of it, she’s as blithe as a bird.”

“ I don’t see why she shouldn’t be happy,” said the cook sensibly. “ Miss Constable isn’t a young lady as has nothing to occupy herself with—she’s a sensible woman ; she isn’t a doll, she never was a doll.”

“ She hasn’t looked happy lately, Mrs. Pincher,” said Matthew, with conviction.

“ Well, a great many young ladies don’t look very happy when they’re just going to be married,” said Mrs. Pincher dogmatically. “ It’s a very serious business, I’ve always said so and I’ve always ’eld to

the same thing ; and I always tell the girls in the 'ouse they can't think too much about marriage beforehand, for it's no use thinking about it after. Miss Constable isn't the kind of young lady that it would be right to be going and giving of 'erself away as if she was a bundle of rags not worth twopence ha'penny. It's a very serious thing is marriage, particular when it's between people of their station."

" I thought you said it was serious for everybody."

" So it is," the cook retorted. " It *is* serious for everybody, to themselves if not to others ; but it's more than serious for these two, it's serious to everybody concerned. Don't you get worrying yourself about Miss Constable's looks, Matthew, it's likely enough that she'll look a deal worse before the wedding day is over."

" She can't do that," said Matthew,

“ she’s looked as if ’er ’eart was breaking times out of number.”

“ Well, I daresay she ’as ; but she never looks as if ’er ’eart was breaking when his lordship’s about.”

“ Why, how do you know, Mrs. Pincher ? ”

“ My kitchen winders,” returned Mrs. Pincher, “ don’t look over the front drive for nothing. I know when people come ’ere and see ’em, they say—‘ What’s them winders ? ’ ‘ Oh,’ they say, ‘ the kitchens, and they looks down the front drive. Well, that’s queer ! ’ I daresay it *is* queer,” she continued, “ most people shoves kitchens away in the back and gives ’em nothing but a court-yard to look on to, but them as built Raburn didn’t do that, and, as I say, my kitchen winders don’t look over the front drive for nothing. There’s no ’eart-break about Miss Constable when she’s driving the Bishop up the avenue in

that little cart of hers; her 'eart breaks always when the Bishop is not to the front, and, I take it, that's the greatest compliment a young lady can pay to the gentleman she's going to be married to."

"Well, I sincerely 'ope it is," said Matthew, "and this morning she's as bloomin' as a rose."

"I'm 'eartily glad to 'ear it," said Mrs. Pincher. "Not that I ever believed, Matthew, that she was anything else."

Before twelve o'clock the Bishop made his appearance, and oh, how radiant he was!

"I've seen the last of my guests off," he said to Cecil, "and I have nothing to do all day. What shall we do with ourselves?"

"Well, first of all——" began Cecil.

"First of all," interrupted the Bishop, "I must thank you with all my heart and soul, dearest, for sending me that little note

last night ; it has made a new man of me. And now," he said, holding her close to him and looking fondly down on her, " we have got a whole long precious summer day before us. What shall we do with it? "

" We will spend part of it," said Cecil, " in here ; and we will spend another part of it in the gardens ; and we will spend another part of it down by the river ; and we will dine together quietly and soberly, as though we had been married for ten years. By the bye," she added, " I am going up to London to-morrow."

" To London—why? "

" Oh, well, you see Father is there, and was very anxious that I should go with him in the first instance. And I think I had better go up for a few days."

" Oh, yes, of course, if you think so. For anything special? "

" Well, you see, June is getting on and I

have not ordered any of my things yet; and of course I cannot possibly be married without clothes and things of that kind."

"No, no, of course not. Why, my dearest, I have scarcely begun to realise yet that our marriage is really within measurable distance. You have kept me so long on tenter-hooks, that I didn't know, I could not be *quite* sure whether you might not fail me, after all."

"Oh," she cried, with deep reproach, "you knew, you must have known that I should not *fail* you. I might have failed myself, but that would have been a very different thing."

"I don't know so much about that," said the Bishop. "I don't believe that the cause would have made any difference to the end. However, these dark days are all over now and I can afford to forget the days of waiting."

CHAPTER VI.

FACE TO FACE WITH THE TRUTH.

All worldly joys do quickly fade,
Nor give to any full content ;
The wisest is who trusts them least,
Who trust them most shall most repent.

—CHAUCER.

A fire devoureth before them ; and behind them a
plain burneth.

—*Joel.*

THE following day, Miss Constable went off to town with her maid, Louise. Her father met her at the terminus and, after putting Louise and the luggage into a cab, carried his daughter off in a hansom to his hotel.

“And what made you take this freak into your head, Madam?” he asked teasingly.

"I thought I had better come up, dear," she replied.

"Well, that was what I told you, only you didn't seem to see the wisdom of my remarks. How is his lordship?"

"Oh, his lordship is blooming," answered Cecil, blushing a fine rosy red. "I believe that he too is coming up to-morrow."

"Really? Well, I haven't any objection. But what made you change your mind?"

"You see," answered Cecil, "I suddenly woke up to the fact that I had not ordered any things and, of course, I can't be married without clothes and so on."

"No, I should imagine not, but you have really seemed so indifferent on the subject, that I began to think you might put your wedding off again."

"Not any more," said Cecil with a happy little smile.

Sir Edward turned and looked at her.

"You look much better than you did,

child," he said, as if he had only just discovered how gay and blooming she seemed.

"Oh, yes, dear, much better than I was. In fact I am all right and as happy as possible."

"And the Bishop is coming up to-morrow?"

"Yes, I think so—for a few days."

And, surely enough, on the following afternoon, the Bishop of Blankhampton made his appearance at the Burlington, where Sir Edward and his daughter were staying. And during the next four or five days, Cecil enjoyed life in truly royal fashion. Every day they took a turn in the Park, sometimes twice; and everybody asked of their neighbours, who was the handsome Bishop and the pretty radiant-looking girl. And then quite a crop of little paragraphs began to appear in the Society papers, somewhat after this style—"And among others, we saw the splendid-looking Bishop

of Blankhampton—the handsomest Bishop on the Bench—with his charming *fiancée*, Miss Constable, the great Blankshire heiress.”

They were obliged to show themselves too, at a good many large social functions ; and one morning he took her down to see his old parish and church.

Then of stern necessity, the Bishop bade farewell to his sweetheart and the metropolis and went back to his engagements in Blankhampton, while Cecil spent another week, going from shop to shop, from dress-maker to tailor, from tailor to milliner, from milliner to bootmaker, and so on, right through the whole gamut of tradespeople, necessary to the composition of a harmonious trousseau.

As soon as they returned to Raburn, the invitations to the wedding were sent out, giving a full month's notice. The wedding day was fixed for the 30th of July ; and follow-

ing right on the heels of the answers to the cards of invitation, wedding presents began to pour in upon the bride-elect. They made a goodly show, for all sorts and conditions of things came from all sorts and conditions of people. A complete set of turquoises and diamonds from the Bishop, together with a triple string of pearls of great beauty and value ; a huge silver bowl from the Netherby tenantry ; a complete toilette service of silver from the Raburn people ; a pair of silver candelabra from the clergy and a diamond bracelet from the ladies of the diocese. From private persons they literally poured in by hundreds and Cecil was kept very hard at work indeed, acknowledging them with proper and suitable expressions of gratitude and thanks.

It was a dreadfully busy time and in the midst of it Miss Constable had to go up to town again for three days, when she

stood for hours in dressmakers' fitting-rooms, while her various garments were tried on.

At this time, the Bishop was not preaching quite so much as he had been doing. He had a good many fixtures, of course—what Bishop in full work has not? A new organ here, a restoration there, a sermon for this charity, or an address for that institution; and whenever it was possible, Cecil accompanied him or, at least, was present when he was likely either to speak or preach. When one is very much occupied, a fortnight is soon gone. Two weeks of Cecil Constable's last month of maidenhood had slipped by, and everything seemed to be going as well and as merrily with her, as the proverbial marriage bell. It happened, however, when the third week of the month was just beginning, that she drove some five miles one evening, to hear the Bishop preach at the

Church of the oldest clergyman in the Diocese.

Now the Bishop was blessed with unusually keen eyesight, and from his place within the altar-rails, he could plainly see Cecil, whenever he lifted his eyes. She was, indeed, a very noticeable figure in the Church which was not a very large one, for she was wearing a light grey tweed dress, with a cotton shirt and a neat sailor hat bound with a white ribbon. Not a detail of her dress or face escaped the Bishop. He could see the white fire of the diamonds on her left hand and equally well, the azure of the turquoises beside them; he could hear every note of her charming voice, and felt indeed almost as if she were sitting beside him. Then when the time for the sermon came, he went, a grand and dignified figure, in his majestic robes, up into the pulpit. There was only one thing about Cecil that evening, which he did not

realise, and that was the throb of pride, with which she saw him in the old carved pulpit, with the soft light of a many branched candelabra falling down upon his smooth fair head and clean cut earnest face, probably a handsomer and more personable man than had ever filled it before.

He took for his text, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" As a sermon it was discreet, calm, temperate, practical and eminently eloquent, directed mostly at the class which forces up prices in hard times, for the benefit of trade. A sermon to be distinctly understood of the people, for the Bishop gave one instance after another of trade facts, which had come under his own personal knowledge, while the vicar of a busy London parish. Instances of great

fish-dealers who deliberately turned whole cargoes of fish into the Thames, because prices had run down, rather than let the starving poor benefit by the glut in the market, which had caused the fall in prices. Instances of an iniquitous thing called a "corner," which he explained to wondering bucolic ears, with the lucidity which was one of his greatest charms. He ended his sermon by saying, "There is no one of us here present to-night, who has not at some time or other in his life, had something offered to him distinctly in exchange for his soul. The outside world may not know it, our own special world may never know whether we take it or leave it; our fellow men and women may never know that which we well know ourselves, or which we ought to know and would know, were not our souls steeped in desire or indolence, they may never suspect we have acquired certain things at

the cost of our own souls. As for ourselves, if we do know, we take a certain course at our own risk and the blame is wholly and solely our own. If we are so blinded by our desires or by the world, as not to be aware that this dire calamity has fallen upon us, we are to be pitied, but we shall not be excused ; for we shall surely awake sooner or later to the awful knowledge, that, though we may indeed have gained the whole world, yet we have gained it in exchange for our own soul ; and what shall it profit man or woman to have acquired myriads of worlds at such a cost ? ”

I can scarcely describe by what instinct the Bishop at this point looked at Cecil, but he saw to his horror that the look which he had first noticed upon her face in the Parish Choir had come back again. His voice died away to silence and the people rose to their feet, as he spoke the

concluding sentence giving glory to God. The offertory took some little time and the Bishop noticed that Cecil did not join in the hymn, which was sung meanwhile. Then after he had pronounced the Blessing, the whole Church was hushed in silence for a moment, before the organist struck up the notes of a recessional hymn, and the choir and clergy slowly filed down the Church and out of sight. The Bishop painfully aware, as he passed Cecil Constable's seat, that she was still kneeling with her face hidden on her arms.

She had promised to drive back with him, having sent her own cart home, without putting up. There are always certain small courtesies to be got through, before a Bishop can leave a Church at which he has been preaching when the service is over, and when the Bishop of Blankhampton reached the Churchyard-gate, accompanied by the Vicar, his vic-

toria with its fidgetty chestnut horses was waiting but there was no sign of Cecil.

"Has Miss Constable come out of the Church?" he asked of the footman.

"Not yet, my lord," the man replied.

"Oh, but you saw everybody come out?"

"I did, my lord."

He turned to the Vicar.

"I think she must be looking at the Church. Excuse me a moment, I will go back and fetch her."

He went back into the Church and went softly up the aisle. Cecil had not moved but was still kneeling with her head bent upon her arms exactly as she had been when the Bishop had passed her. He laid his hand gently on her shoulder.

"Come," he said, "it is time to go home."

She raised her head with a start. He saw that she was very pale and that her eyes had a strange far-away look in them.

"I am ready," she replied, then gathered together her gloves and books and a warm coat which she had brought to wear for the drive home.

"You will put this on?" said the Bishop.

"Yes."

He took it from her and held it so that she could easily slip her arms into it.

"I believe you are very tired," he said, trying to speak in his usual voice.

"A little," she admitted.

"I am afraid you are not very well," said the Rector, when the Bishop and Cecil reached the gate.

"I am a little tired, that is all," she replied. "Oh, no, not anything, thanks, not anything; we shall be home in little more than half an hour."

She got into the carriage with a decision, which quite prevented any acceptance on the Bishop's part, of the good Rector's

hospitality ; so he had little or no choice to do other than to bid his host good-night, and seat himself beside her. Then, with a mutual uplifting of hats, a bow and something meant to be a smile from Cecil, the Bishop gave the signal to the coachman and they started for home. And Cecil never said a word. Twice the Bishop looked at her but she was looking blankly at nothing, her thoughts evidently very far away. At last, he turned himself a little in his seat and under cover of the light rug, took hold of her hand.

“Dearest,” he said gently, “what is it?”

She turned and looked at him, a look of such dire anguish that his very soul seemed to turn sick within him.

“What is it?” he repeated. “You are not well—you feel faint?”

“No,” she answered, “I feel stunned.”

“But why, my dearest, what has happened? You were quite like yourself this

afternoon; what can have happened between then and now to make you look like this?"

"Everything has happened," she answered, under her breath, "everything. Oh, why did you preach that sermon? It seemed all in a moment, to lay my very soul bare, I never really knew myself until to-night. And yet, you were right to preach it, you were right, it was your duty. No, it was something more than that, it was Providence that stepped in to save you."

"To save me!" he echoed. "Why, what nonsense are you saying? To save me from what?"

"What shall it profit a man to gain one thing," she answered, "in exchange for his soul?"

"My dear, you are talking wildly," he managed to say with an assumption of calmness which he was very far from feel-

ing. It was, however, only the calmness of coming despair. His strong face blanched and an involuntary shudder ran through his broad frame. "Cecil—dearest—you cannot mean that anything—any words of mine to-night, could make you fail me now, at the last moment? It is impossible."

"Do you think it is impossible?" she said breathlessly. "I do not know—I feel as if nothing can be impossible. Why did you preach that sermon—'In exchange for his soul.' Am I to give myself in exchange for *your* soul?"

"But you are not doing so; you are talking something very like nonsense. There is no question of your taking my soul. I give you myself, my life, my heart, my name—but my soul—why, there can be no question of my giving you that."

"No, not of your giving it to me, but of your giving it for me."

“No more than any other man does who marries the woman he loves,” he answered soothingly. “My dear, you are tired, you are over-wrought. These ceremonials are too much for your sensitive nature, by-and-by, you will have got used to them. The excitement of all at once giving deep thought—anxious thought, terribly anxious thought, to a subject about which you had not before troubled yourself, has been too much for you. Be advised by me, try to live during the next fortnight without thinking, without thinking at all!”

“You seriously advise me to do that?”

“I do seriously; I do earnestly; I do cold-bloodedly, if you will forgive the expression. I would so advise you, if you were nothing to me, and I were nothing to the man you were going to marry.”

“I will think about it,” she said. “Just now, I feel as if my very heart had been torn out of my body. Up to now, I have

thought only of myself and my own feelings ; of my own life in the future, but to-night, you have made me think of yours."

It is only fair to admit that the Bishop was but human. At that moment he could cheerfully have bitten his tongue out, for having preached a sermon, which would arouse any such feelings in her mind.

"Do be guided by me in this, dearest," he said gently, and holding her hand very tightly. "You are naturally nervous, and over-wrought, and unstrung. You are not fit, at present, to take the decision of these great questions upon yourself. Afterwards, afterwards, after the thirtieth, when there is not so much happiness hanging upon your convictions—I mean earthly happiness, of course—you will be able to look upon these questions in an unbiassed light. As it is now, you are biassed to the last extent—it is *impossible* for you to take a fair view of the matter."

"But you are biassed too," she said quickly.

"Not at all," he answered. "My belief remains precisely what it always has been. I see a little more need of patience, of charity, of making allowances for the doubts, cares, and weaknesses of others, than perhaps I did before; but my belief is not altered one hair's breadth—*nothing* could alter it. I believe what I have always believed, what I believe to be right; what I believe to be the best finger-post that we can find in this world to guide us into and make us fit for a better one. After all, what is religion, what is faith? Only the working out of a perfectly reasonable, a perfectly simple, and a perfectly easy code of life. Our religion was not given to us to be a sort of bogie, following us round and making us miserable at every turn. On the contrary, it was intended to make us happier here in this world, it was

intended to make the world and poor human-nature better and brighter and happier ; not to fill our lives with sorrow and sadness, and mortification."

"Yes, I know. I will think about it—I will try to do so as you tell me."

"You want to do as I tell you, I hope?" he said tenderly.

"Oh, yes, you must know that. I want to do what is right and I thought my way was quite clear ; but to-night the clouds have all come back again, and I feel that there is a lion in the way. I am very wretched, Archie."

"My dearest, I know you are. But here we are at Raburn. Don't look like that ; people will think we have been quarrelling, you and I, and, although I care as little as most men for outward appearances, I should not like your father's people to imagine for one moment, that I had been quarrelling with and ill-using you."

"They will never think that you have done anything that was unkind to me," she said gravely. "Nobody could ever believe but that you were the best and kindest and dearest of men."

"And yet you don't trust me," he put in.

"Oh, yes I do ; but you are too generous—it is your worst fault. But I trust you implicitly."

"Not to the extent of letting me decide an important question for you."

"Because," she answered, "I am afraid that you might decide it more in favour of me than of yourself. You are strong but the strongest men are weak sometimes, and if it is given to me to be stronger than you, I must do what I believe to be the right. That is reason, is it not?"

"I don't know," said the Bishop. "No, I can't see that it is. It is a one-sided piece of reasoning altogether. At all events, Cecil, there is one thing which

right or wrong, conviction or no conviction, you cannot do."

"And that?" she asked, startled a little by his tone.

"You cannot break our engagement with honour," he answered, not looking at her but straight away through the gathering dusk.

In another moment, they were sweeping along the avenue at Raburn, and then the horses drew up, with much prancing and fuss, at the great entrance door.



CHAPTER VII.

THE PIECES DON'T FIT.

Not in the clamour of the crowded street,
Not in the shouted plaudits of the crowd,
But in ourselves, are triumph and defeat.

—LONGFELLOW.

In the valley of decision.

—Joel.

WHEN the Bishop parted with Cecil Constable that evening, it was on the understanding that he should go out to Raburn the following afternoon not later than five o'clock. He forebore from continuing the conversation, which had passed between them during their drive home and on parting, had only begged her to trust implicitly in the future—to trust him.

Needless to say, the girl passed a wretched night and when the Bishop entered her little sitting-room the following afternoon, he realised, in a moment, that things had gone hardly with her.

“My dearest,” he cried, “you are killing yourself—you are very ill.”

“Yes, I do feel desperately ill,” she answered, “sick in body and sick in mind. Oh, Archie, I am so miserable, I am so wretched.”

He drew her on to the sofa and held her hands fast in his.

“Tell me all about it,” he said, in soothing tone. “You look as if you had been awake all night.”

“I have not been to bed at all,” she said wearily.

“Oh, my dear,” he cried with the deepest reproach, “why don’t you trust me in this matter—why won’t you believe that I know what is best for you? I thought

we had put away all these doubts of yours and that when you sent me that dear little letter, your mind was at rest."

"On those points, yes," she admitted. "on all the points that you and I talked over I realised that I had perhaps thought more of the letter, than of the spirit."

"Then what is troubling your mind now?" he asked gently.

"Everything, Archie, everything. If it were only such questions as you and I talked over before, I would admit—cheerfully admit—that you were perfectly right in everything you have said. Then I thought that those were the important things, but now I know that there is only one thing for me to do"—speaking painfully, as if she were dragging the words up from her unwilling heart — "with honour——"

"And that?" asked the Bishop.

"Is to tell you that I cannot marry you.

No"—putting up her hand to stop him from speaking. "It is no use your trying to persuade me—I have made up my mind. It will break my heart, and I am afraid it will break yours—and everybody will talk—oh, how they will talk—and I shall have to send all the horrid wedding presents back, and explain to people that it is going to be no wedding—and—and—I think it will kill me."

"You are not going to break faith with me," said the Bishop, in a very cold voice.

"Yes—I must. You said last night, that I could not do so with honour. Under ordinary circumstances, of course I could not. Oh, Archie, believe me I would sooner put my hand into a living fire, than have to tell you, under ordinary circumstances, what—I—I have got to tell you to-day. It is not of my own will—you know that it is not—I don't want to break with you. Oh, you know—you cannot

have any doubt that I love you with my whole heart—that I am distracted—heart-broken—forlorn and wretched at the very idea of parting from you ; but I have a duty to you and to your position. I cannot marry you. It would be like selling your soul. For my own, it would not matter—I don't believe that I have a soul to sell, *but you do*. And if you are right in all that you believe in and I knew and you knew that I had bargained it away, I should never know peace again and there could be no real love between us. When you realised what you had done, when you came to your senses, you would no longer love me. If you were too good to hate me, you would look upon me as the Christ, that you believe in, looked upon the Devil when he tempted him."

"What do you mean?" he cried.

"Mean — oh, isn't it clear enough? Haven't I made it plain enough? Will you

force me to say literally—in English—what you must know—what you must have realised already? Archie, I love you—you know it—you cannot need any more words of mine to convince you of that; but I have been forced during the last few hours, to admit to myself, that I am utterly without a religious belief of any kind. I believe in nothing—I accept *nothing* of what is *your life*. I have been up all night and I have read the whole of the four Gospels over several times; but I can't reconcile them to my reason. The pieces don't fit, Archie. I hate to say it, because I know that it hurts you to hear it—but I don't believe a word of it. So how could I, giving little or no credence to the past, regarding it all as a mere fable, having no reverence for the religion of the present, and without any belief or hope in a world to come, marry a man in your position? Still more to the point, how could you, in

your position, marry a woman of my way of thinking?"

"But this is new," exclaimed the Bishop—"you never gave me a hint of this before."

"I scarcely admitted it even to myself. It was not until last night, when you put that awful thought into my mind, that you were gaining me in exchange for your soul, that I realised what a terrible thing was about to happen. Don't try to persuade me otherwise. You said that last night about honour, but I feel that no woman of honour could have done other than I have done. Don't try to persuade me to go straight on and trust to time to put everything right. I should only," she continued, not giving him time to speak, "I should only despise you, if you were weak enough to run such a risk."

"I am not going to ask you to run it," said the Bishop, in a dull hard voice.

She looked at him piteously, but for the

first time, there was no answer in his eyes.

He got up and walked to the window, where he stood looking out over the lovely summer landscape, with eyes so full of pain, that they saw nothing, with a brain all in a whirl of misery, and a heart like a lump of lead. The girl did not dare to speak. She sat still, just as he had released her from his strong and tender grasp—a girl did I say? no, no longer a girl, but a sorrowful, heart-stricken woman, with a white, drawn face, and eyes of living anguish, in which there was no sign of tears. She longed to go to him, not as an equal, not to put her arms about his neck as she had been used to do; but to creep to his feet, as an out-cast, a leper, who would fain kiss even the ground upon which they trod. But she dared not. She felt that she had by her own act, if not by her own will, put herself completely away from him for ever. For

the first time in her life, she was afraid of him, the more afraid because he had said so little, because he had not reproached her, because he had not in any way attempted to refute her words or to overcome her scruples. No, that was the hardest blow of all—he had accepted her fiat, and she felt that she had put her hand to a plough, from which there could be no drawing back during all the rest of her life.

It seemed to her that he stood for hours looking out over the gardens and wide-spread lands of Raburn, but, in reality, it was only for some ten minutes that the silence lasted between them. She did not know—how could she know—that while he stood there, he was only struggling for mastery over himself, struggling to command himself, so that he should not break down in her presence. At last, however, he turned towards her again, going

back to the great bear-skin before the hearth, and rested his elbow on the wide mantelshelf, so that he could partly shade his eyes with his hand.

“ You will forgive me,” he said, in a very unsteady voice, “ if I go away. It is useless, in the face of what you have told me, to prolong the agony of this discussion. It is useless for me to protest to you, the depth of the blow which has fallen upon me to-day. I have only one thing to ask—that you will make what explanation you like to your father, and that you will not pain me by sending back to me anything that I have given you. Perhaps, after a time, when I have got over this, you will let me see you again. For the rest, I will write to you. I must go now.”

He did not attempt to take formal leave of her but went out of the room without daring to look at her again.

She had not moved during the time that

he stood at the window or while he was speaking; but when she realised that he was going, going for ever, she stretched her despairing arms towards him and opened her mouth as if to beg him to stay. Then a realisation of what she had done, of what had happened, of the irrevocable barrier that had risen up between them, came upon her like a flash of lightning; the imploring words died upon her lips, her trembling hands fell back upon her knees, the door closed and he was gone.

The coachman had, in accordance with his usual custom, put up his horses and great was the estimable Matthew's surprise, when on answering the hall-bell, he found the Bishop standing there alone.

"Will you order my carriage, please," he said.

It was the first time since his engagement to Miss Constable, that the Bishop had ever spoken to the valued old servant

of the house, without the pleasant and friendly use of his name. In a moment, Matthew realised that something dreadful had happened. He answered, "Certainly, my lord," and bustled away to apprise the Bishop's coachman that his master wanted the carriage round at once.

"Why -- what's up?" asked the episcopal Jehu.

"I don't know what's up," replied Matthew, "but whatever it is, it's something serious. His Lordship is as white as a ghost and he spoke like a man in a dream."

But a very few minutes passed before the carriage came round. The discreet Matthew returned to the hall at the same moment and ushered the Bishop out, as if he were a total stranger and this his first call on the lady of the house.

"Home, my lord?" asked the footman.

"The Palace—yes," answered the Bishop.

He never looked up, he was too stunned to give Matthew his usual kindly smile and gesture of farewell, he simply sat in the carriage like a man of stone, keeping himself under control till he could get into some friendly shelter, from the same instinct that the wounded deer speeds until it reaches covert.

Just as he turned into the high road, he met Lady Vivian evidently driving up to the house and to that lady's no small surprise and dismay, he passed her without recognition.

"That was the Bishop," she said to her companion, a lady who was staying at Ingleby.

"Really—well he doesn't look to me like a man who is going to be married next week," said her friend. "Is he short-sighted?"

"Oh, no, not at all. But did you notice that he never looked at me?"

“He looked more like a man going to be hanged, than one going to be married,” declared the other.

“I thought so too,” said Lady Vivian with conviction, “however, we shall see what Cecil says.”

But Matthew blandly informed them that Miss Constable was not at home.

“Is she in the town?”

“I believe not, my lady,” said Matthew urbanely. “Miss Constable did not tell me whether she was going into Blankhampton or not.”

“Oh, I hope she is well?”

“Yes, my lady, Miss Constable is quite well,” Matthew replied.

“I met the Bishop at the end of the avenue,” said Lady Vivian.

“His lordship has just been here, my lady,” Matthew replied.

“I see. Well, give my love to Miss Constable.”

“Certainly, my lady.”

Now, as a matter of fact, Matthew had intuitively grasped the fact that something terrible had happened, and bearing possible visitors in view, he made bold enough to seek his young mistress out and ascertain her views thereupon. The usual afternoon tea being ready, he carried it into the boudoir and arranged it before her.

“Are you at home to visitors, ma’am?” he asked.

Cecil looked up.

“No—no, Matthew, not to anybody.”

“Very good, ma’am.”

“Mrs. Pincher,” said Matthew a few minutes later, “I don’t believe there’ll be any wedding on the 30th inst.”

“*What!*” she cried.

“Mark my words, Mrs. Pincher, there’ll be no wedding. H’m—there’s visitors already,” and Matthew hurried out that he

might, as he afterwards put it, get rid of Lady Vivian.

Meantime, the Bishop's horses carried him swiftly along the smooth country roads, through the town and back to the great echoing Palace. He looked neither to right nor to left, indeed he never raised his eyes from his own feet. He was quite unconscious that between Raburn and the town he met Sir Edward Constable driving himself in a high dog-cart, or that, in the streets of Blankhampton, he passed many other people, who knew him. He saw nobody. As soon as he reached the Palace, he gave orders to the butler, "I am at home to no one," and went into his study, shutting the door after him and turning the key in the lock. And there he stayed for hours, stricken down as only the strong can be, battling hard with the terrible anguish which had that day eaten into his very soul. When it

was nearly eight o'clock, he rang the bell.

"Don't prepare dinner for me to-night," he said, "I am too busy to eat it. Tell cook to send me up a cup of strong tea at once."

The man bowed and retired. The Bishop's study always looked busy, the tables were always littered with papers, so that the excuse should have seemed a good one. But the servant was not to be deceived.

"Something 'orrid 'as 'appened to my lord," he remarked to the dignified butler, who watched over the Bishop's daily comfort. "'E ain't going to 'ave any dinner. That's bad. 'E's too busy to eat it. I've never known 'im too busy to eat 'is dinner before. I wonder what's up?"

"Oh, what should be up?" replied his superior with infinite scorn, "you always were given to fancying things, Wilson.

It's very foolish of you : as if his lordship's a man to go without his dinner for a mere fad."

Meanwhile, Cecil Constable had with feverish thirst drank a cup of tea but had not touched the contents of the pretty three-cornered basket which Matthew had brought with it. And then she slipped back among the cushions again, as if all the vitality and strength had been taken out of her during the past hour. It was not very long before Sir Edward, cheery and a little fussy, bustled into the room.

"I met the Bishop," he told her, "and the man was so wrapped up in a brown study that he never even saw me. Why—what's the matter—what has happened?"

Cecil tried to speak but the words choked her.

"He has been here," she managed to say at last.

"Been here? Well, there's nothing

wonderful in that; of course he has been here, I met him—where else should he have been? But—” in a different tone, “has anything happened?”

“Yes,” she replied, scarcely above a whisper.

“What is it? Don’t beat about the bush—tell me what is the matter.”

“I don’t know how to tell you.”

“Anything between you and the Bishop?”

“Everything,” she answered.

“But what do you mean by everything?”

“It’s all over,” said Cecil with difficulty.

“Your marriage?”

“Yes.”

“Do you mean to say that your engagement is broken off—that you are not going to be married on the 30th?”

“Yes that is what I mean.”

“But why?”

"I cannot tell you."

"Nonsense—you must tell me."

"I cannot tell you," she repeated. "Oh," in a wailing voice, "don't ask me why. It is all over—there is going to be no wedding at all—he will never come here again. That's enough, isn't it? What do the details matter?"

"But they do matter," Sir Edward persisted. "I have a right to know—I must know."

"I cannot tell you. Oh, Father, cannot you see that it is killing me to talk about it? Don't, for pity's sake, ask me any more questions. Help me to get through the next horrid week, to tell people that I am not going to be married, that they needn't send me any more wedding presents, that they can take back those they have sent, and give them to somebody else; that there won't be any wedding on the 30th—more likely a funeral."

Sir Edward fairly fumed.

“This is all very mysterious, Cecil,” he said abruptly. “And if you were an ordinary young lady, this sort of thing might pass muster; but you are not an ordinary young lady, you are a very important person indeed, and Miss Constable of Raburn cannot be taken up and put down in this way. If you won’t give me an explanation, I must demand one from the Bishop himself.”

“I would rather not give you any explanation,” she replied. “It is impossible for our marriage to take place and that ought to be enough, even for you.”

“What am I to say to people who ask about it?”

“Nothing,” said Cecil. “You need not say anything—it is enough for them that there will be no marriage. You might at least do this much for me.”

“I must seek my explanation from the

Bishop himself," he said vexedly, "an explanation I must have; and if you won't give it me, I must get it from him."

"I cannot give it to you. Look at me. Cannot you see that I am heart-broken? Cannot you see that I am too crushed and wretched to talk it over and describe my agony? I don't think you are kind—I did not expect you to make me suffer like this, in the most cruel sorrow that I have ever known. I did not expect it from you."

"But it's so inexplicable," he explained, his sympathy for her all blotted out by his annoyance and his surprise. "Here are you, on the very eve of your marriage, with the invitations all sent out more than a fortnight ago, presents come in from the tenantry and from half of our friends, with your settlements arranged and drawn up and your clothes got ready. I come home, all unsuspecting and unwittingly, and you simply cast a bombshell at me, that you

are not going to be married at all. I don't understand it. I don't know what to say to people."

"It cannot be necessary to say anything to people," Cecil repeated. "You have the invitation list and you will send out an intimation to everybody who has been asked that there will be no wedding. Nobody could be so cruel as to come harassing me or you to know the reason why? It is quite enough for the world that it is so."

"But I am not the world," Sir Edward persisted.

"I know that you are not the world—but I know too that you are the *one* who might have some consideration for me."

"It is consideration for you that makes me desirous of knowing everything," said Sir Edward testily. "For anything I know to the contrary, the Bishop may have jilted you."

Cecil broke into a dreary laugh. Sir Edward fumed on.

“And if he has done so, I warn you and I warn him that not even his cloth shall protect him.”

She looked up, shaking her head.

“He needs no cloth to protect him from any imputation that is disgraceful to him. Forgive me, if I go away and do not come down again to-night; I cannot, I simply cannot bear this discussion any longer, but I hope I may trust you to see the proper announcements given to the world. It is a thing that I cannot do for myself.”

She went out of the room unsteadily, like one just recovering from severe illness, and when she had shut the door, Sir Edward realised that she did not mean to tell him anything of what had caused her broken engagement.

“I see nothing for it,” he muttered, “but going over to the Palace and trying to get

some information out of him—though he won't tell me anything either."

There is, you know, a wide difference between an affair of that kind, a broken engagement and an abandoned marriage, when it is closely concerning yourself and when it only closely concerns somebody belonging to you. Sir Edward Constable was bewildered, puzzled and intensely annoyed, but he did nothing out of the common course. He dressed for dinner and he sat down by himself to eat it; and being a loquacious person and bound to relieve his mind by talking to somebody, he partially unburdened himself to the inestimable Matthew, who, be it remembered, had been over fifty years, man and boy, at Raburn.

"Miss Constable is not coming down to dinner, Matthew," he said, when he entered the dining-room. "You might tell Louise to take her up some tea and something of

that kind presently. Don't bother her with any dinner. By the bye, send James out of the room, will you?"

The discreet Matthew lifted his eyes and jerked his thumb at the door, as an indication to his subordinate that he might depart.

"I'm afraid, Sir Edward, something has happened this afternoon."

"I can't make it out, Matthew, I can't make it out. There's going to be no wedding."

"I said so, Sir Edward," said Matthew, "I said so."

"But why? What happened this afternoon?" Sir Edward asked holding his spoon poised above his soup plate while he stared at Matthew. "What took place? I cannot get anything out of Miss Constable, excepting that she's not going to be married on the 30th."

"Well," said Matthew, resting his arm

on the back of his master's chair and standing in the attitude that twenty years ago was considered the most correct one for the photographer's art. "Well, Sir Edward, it was like this. The Bishop, he called here close on 'alf past four o'clock and I showed him into the boudore, and Simpson, he put his horses up—as usual. And just on the point of five, when I was going up, to carry the tea, the 'all-bell rang, and I went to see what was wanted, and his lordship was standing in the hall and he says to me, 'Will you order my carriage, please?' Now, generally, Sir Edward, his lordship says, like he did when he come in this afternoon, 'Ah, Matthew, how are you?' or, 'Will you order my carriage, Matthew?' or something pleasant and recognising-like. But this afternoon, he never looked at me but he just says, 'Will you order my carriage, please?' as if I'd been a hired waiter at somebody's

house that he'd never been to before, and didn't mean to go to again. And of course I said, 'Certainly, my lord,' and I went and hurried Simpson up and the carriage came round and he got in. He never looked at me, but his face was like chalk and his hands were shaking, and I knew that there'd not be any wedding on the 30th—I said so. And his footman said, 'Home, my lord?' and he said—'The Palace—yes,' and then he drove away, without turning his eyes and just as if he was made of stone. Well, then, Sir Edward, I went in and I carried the tea in to Miss Constable and she was like death too. And I asked her if she would receive any other visitors and she said 'No, not anyone,' and so, when Lady Vivian came, I told her Miss Constable was not at home."

"How did the Bishop look when he came?"

"As usual, Sir Edward, as usual. 'Ah,

Matthew,' said he, 'Miss Constable at home?' just as pleasant and affable as usual."

"I can't make it out," said Sir Edward, with what was almost a groan, "I can't make it out, anyhow. And, Miss Constable won't say anything, not a word. However, look here, tell William to get me out a dogcart, and one of the grooms can go with me."

"Very good, Sir Edward."

"As I said, Mrs. Pincher," the estimable Matthew remarked five minutes later, "there's going to be no wedding on the 30th instant."

"You don't say so?" said Mrs. Pincher.

"Miss Constable isn't dining; Sir Edward, he can't make anything out and he's ordered a dogcart to go over to the Palace to-night."

"To-night, Matthew?"

"To-night, Mrs. Pincher. I knew it,"

he added triumphantly, "there are some things in this life, that you can't make any mistake about. And that kind of flare up is one of 'em."



CHAPTER VIII.

SORE STRICKEN.

True be it said, what man it sayd,
That love with gall and honey doth abound,
But if the one be with the other way'd,
For every dram of honey therein found
A pound of gall doth over it redound.

—SPENSER.

A tale bearer revealeth secrets : but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.

—*Proverbs.*

HAVING finished dinner, Sir Edward lighted a cigarette and started for the Palace as soon as the dogcart had come round.

“Don’t forget to look after Miss Constable,” he said to Matthew, as they reached the door-step.

“I will, Sir Edward, I will,” said Matthew sympathetically.

It was then very little after nine o'clock. He reached the Palace in about half an hour and asked to see the Bishop.

"His lordship is very much occupied Sir Edward," said the solemn butler confidentially, "but if you will come this way, Sir, I have no doubt he will see you."

He led the way into the dimly lighted drawing-room, turning up a couple of the many gas jets before he sought the Bishop. After a minute or two, he returned, saying that his lordship would see Sir Edward, if he would kindly step this way.

The man led him to the Bishop's study and ushered him into the room, closing the door behind him. The Bishop was standing by the large writing-desk which stood in the centre of the room.

"I expected you, Sir Edward," he said, holding out his hand.

"Then I won't apologise for coming," said Sir Edward, in a guarded tone. "It

is of course natural that I should want an explanation of what has taken place between my daughter and you to-day."

"And I am sorry that I cannot give you one," said the Bishop steadily. He pointed to a huge easy chair set cornerwise to the desk, and sat down himself in his usual place, that is in the writing chair, where he had been sitting before.

"I think it is my due to have an explanation," Sir Edward blurted out.

"To a certain extent, yes," the Bishop said. "Miss — Constable — Cecil — has definitely broken off our engagement and done away with all idea of our marriage, and I take it, that there is nothing more to be said."

"Then it is Cecil's doing," Sir Edward exclaimed.

The Bishop looked up with a sudden light in his eyes.

"My dear Sir Edward, has it been in

your mind, even for a moment, that *I* could have failed Cecil ? ”

“ Well, so to speak, no ; but in the face of such a catastrophe, such an upheaval of everything, as was suddenly flung at me on my return home to-day, one thinks a thousand things that are both likely and unlikely. I met you this afternoon, just outside Blankhampton. I was on my way home—you never saw me. I thought *that* queer enough, and then, when I got home, Cecil told me the bare fact that the marriage would not take place. Now, it is almost the last moment, the invitations have been out a fortnight, the house is littered with wedding presents, my daughter has made every preparation, the settlements are all drawn up ; and then all at once everything is knocked on the head. And I am not even told the reason why.”

“ The reason is,” said the Bishop, in a

not very steady voice, "that Cecil has definitely decided not to marry me."

"But why?—That is what I want to know."

"And that is what I cannot tell you," said the Bishop. "If Cecil likes to tell you, she is, of course, quite at liberty to do so. But the reason is hers and I cannot give her away, even to you—unless she chooses to do so herself. That it is not *my* wish," he went on with a great effort to keep calm, "I think needs no words of mine to make you believe. I don't think I can possibly look like a man, who has either broken his engagement to the woman of his choice, or like one that is glad that she has broken hers."

"No," said Sir Edward, "I saw that when I came in here and, for the matter of that, Matthew told me that you looked——"

"Oh, for God's sake spare me!" cried

the Bishop passionately. "I know what I looked like, I know what I felt like, I know what I feel like now. But the marriage is out of the question, Sir Edward; it is no use trying to patch this thing up, it is no use my howling about my feelings, it is no use your being annoyed about what people will say, they'll talk—they'll talk—let 'em talk—the main fact remains the same; there will be no marriage between your daughter and me on the 30th of this month."

"I can't make it out, I think I ought to be told everything. It is only my due and my right that I should be told what it all means. It must be something serious; you are not the kind of man to take this pronounced view for a mere fad. You are sitting here in this Palace breaking your heart and my girl is sitting at home in her bedroom breaking hers. Damn it, sir, I want to know the reason why. There, I

beg your pardon, I forgot for a minute that you were a Bishop. Still, you will admit that I have some cause to feel badly used over this. It is not a light thing to have one's daughter's marriage broken off in a moment in this way. It wouldn't be a light thing, if it were that we had found a man to be unworthy of her, if it were that a man had got tired of her or that she had got tired of him, or that there was anything in her past, like there is in the past of plenty of women. It would be different then. But you two haven't got tired of each other——"

"My God," muttered the Bishop under his breath, "how long is this man going on?"

"A man and a woman," went on Sir Edward, who was much too excited to hear the Bishop's invocation, "don't go on loving each other, as you two did, right up to a certain point and then snap—like a bit of glass. I want to know what it is?"

“Well, Sir Edward, I won’t tell you,” said the Bishop, “and that’s plain. Cecil has a reason ; it’s enough for her and it’s got to be enough for me. That she loves me,” he went on, with a suspicious quaver in his tones, “is my only consolation, my only bit of comfort. That I am absolutely hers, now and for all time to come, while I have any consciousness of my individuality, is equally certain. Please God that it may be some small consolation to her. Beyond that I simply refuse to say another word.”

“I must ask you one more question,” Sir Edward said, after a moment’s pause. “Is there any chance of things working out smooth again?”

“I don’t know,” the Bishop replied, “that depends upon Cecil entirely. So far as I am concerned, Sir Edward, I assure you I have had no part in this unexpected and terrible rupture. I am acquiescing solely of necessity. If Cecil ever says, ‘Come’ I

shall be ready; if she never says that one word, I shall still be waiting for her. Beyond that, I can say nothing—indeed, there is nothing more for me to say.”

“Then it is no use our prolonging this interview. You are knocked all of a heap enough as it is,” said Sir Edward rising. “And I must say, Bishop, before I go, that I am something more than sorry, something more than grieved that this unpleasant business has happened. I was proud at the prospect of having you for my son-in-law, I admire you and look up to you more than to any man of your cloth that I have ever known; and, although I suppose of necessity, ordinary intercourse must for a time at least, cease between my house and yours, you’ll remember, won’t you, that you have one good friend at Raburn, who will always be glad to do you a service, and who will always be glad to come to you, whenever you ask him? I

can't say more. I can do nothing it seems. Well, good-bye, Bishop," he said, holding out his hand and gripping the Bishop's hard. "I am more unhinged and cut up about this than words can say. Don't come out with me, don't stand on ceremony with me. God bless you. Good-bye."

It was many a long year since Sir Edward Constable had felt anything like the sensation of tears in his eyes, but he stumbled out of the Bishop's study like a man walking in his sleep and, as he went down the long corridor, he had to wink his eyes very, very hard, to force the treacherous drops back to their starting place.

"It's a mystery," his thoughts ran, as he drove homewards along the quiet country roads, "and I shall probably never get to the bottom of it. But my girl has done a bad thing for herself to-day, she has missed the greatest chance of happiness that any woman ever had."

CHAPTER IX.

FOOD FOR THE BUSY-BODIES.

Life's more than breath and the quick round of blood :
It is a great spirit and a busy heart.

—BAILEY.

And I will cause you to pass under the rod.

—*Ezekiel.*

WITH the following day the astounding news burst like a bombshell over all classes of society. In Blankhampton and Blankshire the news ran like wildfire. Soon after nine o'clock in the morning, Sir Edward's confidential servant, Badger, set the ball rolling in the town itself, for he left a written intimation at each of the newspaper offices, asking them to be good enough to insert a paragraph in their next

issue, to the effect that the marriage between the Lord Bishop of Blankhampton and Miss Constable of Raburn, fixed for the 30th instant, would not take place. Then he went into the principal bookseller's shop and ordered five hundred cards to be printed, with the announcement containing the same information.

"But it isn't true?" said the head of the business, staring at Badger with open-mouthed surprise.

"Yes, Mr. Thompkinson, it's quite true," said Badger in positive tones.

"Is it him, or is it her?" the bookseller asked.

"Well, we don't really know anything. However, from what I can gather, Miss Constable and his lordship won't say anything but, of course, I know pretty well what Sir Edward thinks. It all happened yesterday afternoon, and Sir Edward went down to see the Bishop last night, and he

thinks Miss Constable simply broke it off. Some of our people saw the Bishop come yesterday, just as smiling and happy as usual, and Matthew—you know Matthew, the butler—he saw him off, when he left half-an-hour later and he said he looked like death. As to Miss Constable, she's like nothing but a ghost this morning."

"Oh, then you've seen her?"

"Yes, she came down to breakfast, she didn't dine last night—but she came down to breakfast this morning. She looks like a ghost; I couldn't describe her looks as anything else."

You may imagine, in a busy town, on a brilliant July morning, when most people in the habit of going to London during the season, had flown back to their country seats for a couple of weeks, before going off to their foreign spas or other health giving resorts; when the next set of people

were waiting for their children's holidays to begin, before they packed themselves and their belongings off to the seaside; when everybody was out and about, and a great many were actually delaying their departure in order to be present at the Bishop's wedding,—you may imagine how the wonderful news spread from mouth to mouth. Everybody was incredulous, but there was no getting over the intimation written on the Raburn notepaper, which Mr. Thompkinson, the bookseller, kept in his shop all that day and showed to every customer that came in. Her ladyship of Ingleby was among those to whom the news came with the suddenness of a clap of summer thunder.

“You have heard the news, of course,” said Lady Alice Wynyard to her cousin, Monica Beaumont, whom she met in St. Thomas's Street.

“News, no—what news?”

“Cecil Constable’s engagement is broken off.”

“I don’t believe it.”

“Well, go into Thompkinson’s and ask about it—they’ll tell you. I must be off now for I’m due at Mrs. Powell’s to get a couple of dresses fitted on. See you afterwards perhaps.”

She whisked into her pony-trap and was off before her astonished cousin could say a word. Miss Beaumont turned on her heel and walked straight into the book-seller’s shop.

“What is this wonderful news, Mr. Thompkinson?”

“News, Miss Beaumont? About—Miss Constable’s engagement?”

“Yes.”

“It is—it is broken off—the marriage will not take place. You would like to see the note I had about it this morning. Of course, I don’t consider this a breach of

confidence—the sooner it is circulated, the better pleased the family will be. Yes, here it is,” laying a sheet of note-paper on the counter before her.

“Sir Edward Constable,” it read, “wishes to inform his friends that the marriage of his daughter to the Bishop of Blankhampton, will not take place on the 30th instant.”

“I never was so surprised in my life,” said Miss Beaumont, breathlessly.

“Nor I, indeed, Madam,” said Mr. Thompkinson, “nor I. His lordship was here yesterday morning and he seemed as bright and affable as usual, and the previous evening I saw them together at my own church—I live a few miles out, at Sparksworth. We had a special sermon from the Bishop on the occasion of a new organ being put into the church. Miss Constable sat just in front of me, and I don’t think there was anything wrong then—in fact, I

saw her drive home in the Bishop's carriage with him."

"It is most extraordinary," said Miss Beaumont, "most extraordinary. I can't make it out. Well, I came into town this morning to buy my wedding present, but I suppose I needn't trouble about it now."

"I think a good many wedding presents will be thrown back on their givers' hands," said Mr. Thompson, "we have had a good many bought here, very handsome ones too, and my neighbour, Mr. Ward, the silversmith, was telling me just now, that he had had quite a large quantity bought of him—in fact, they had to get quite a fresh assortment of goods down for the purpose."

"I cannot make it out," said Miss Beaumont.

She did not linger any longer, but after the manner of people who have got a choice bit of news, a little before the rest

of the world, she bustled out in search of those, to whom she might impart the astonishing information. She had already told three people when she saw the Ingleby carriage, with its light drab liveries faced with pale blue, coming down the street. A glance showed her that Lady Vivian was alone, so she unceremoniously put up her hand as a signal to the coachman to stop.

“Oh, Lady Vivian,” she exclaimed, “have you heard the news?”

“News, my dear—what news?”

“Cecil Constable’s engagement is off—the marriage is not going to take place.”

“Nonsense.”

“True. I have just seen the form of intimation which is being printed at Thompkinson’s. It is in Sir Edward’s own writing—oh, there is no mistake about it. And they say Cecil is heart-broken.”

“And the Bishop?” asked Lady Vivian, in blank astonishment.

“Oh, well, nobody has seen him. They do say, but I can’t say that it’s true, but they do say that he came to the conclusion that Cecil was too frivolous for him.”

“I don’t believe that,” said Lady Vivian promptly.

“No, well, that was what I said. But, of course, people will talk, and people will say what they think and, of course, in the face of such a sudden break off as this, people will think.”

“I shall go out to Raburn and see—I must get to the bottom of this,” said Lady Vivian.

In truth, she was as good as her word, for she bade the coachman turn his horses and drive straight to Raburn. The dear lady might have saved herself the trouble, Matthew told her with many apologetic gestures that Miss Constable could not see anybody.

“Well, I’d rather that you would take

my name in. I think she will see me," said Lady Vivian, who simply never admitted that she could be looked upon as an outsider in the matter of love affairs.

"I will do that, my lady, of course. Will you come in?"

"No, I will stay here, thank you."

So Matthew went in and intimated to Louise that her ladyship from Ingleby was waiting at the door and that she intended to see Miss Constable.

"Well, I will tell Mademoiselle that miladi is here, but I am sure she will not see her," said Louise volubly.

And, sure enough, after a couple of minutes, she came back and down into the hall again.

"Mademoiselle sends her love to miladi and she is very sorry that she cannot see her. She is exceedingly indisposed, suffering very much from a head-ache."

“Is Sir Edward at home?” asked Lady Vivian, after a minute’s pause.

“I believe Sir Edward is at home, my lady,” replied Matthew, who really and honestly thought that it would be good for his master to have somebody to talk to for a little while.

“Well, ask Sir Edward if he will see me—I should like to see him.”

When Matthew returned he said, with a beaming countenance, carefully assorted with one of extreme misery, that Sir Edward was at home and would see Lady Vivian with pleasure.

Lady Vivian, therefore alighted from her carriage with much satisfaction but, if the dear lady thought she was about to get exclusive and detailed information out of her old friend, Sir Edward Constable, she had for once in her life made a mistake. Nobody can give information of which they are not actually in possession, and Sir Edward was

not able to give Lady Vivian information which he had not been able to obtain for himself.

"I don't think Cecil will see anybody," he said, looking at her, with a becomingly mournful countenance. "You see she's knocked over with this business."

"But what is the reason, Sir Edward? Has anything happened?"

"I don't know. That's what I want to know myself. I came home yesterday afternoon and the whole thing was off. That is all I know about it. And he is sitting in his great big palace breaking his heart, and my girl is upstairs in her bedroom, breaking hers. I can't tell you the reason, Lady Vivian, because I don't know it myself. You know now just as much as I do about the whole affair."

"Did Cecil break it off?"

"Yes, Cecil broke it off."

"Do you think she found out that she

was not fond of him—that she did not care enough about him ? ”

“ No, I think not,” he answered promptly —“ I don’t think she would be so knocked over if that was it. No, I don’t understand it—I don’t know what it means—it’s a mystery. I can get nothing out of either of them, except that both say the marriage cannot take place. But I don’t think, Lady Vivian—you know, you and I are old friends, and we can afford to speak plainly to each other—I don’t think you’d better speak of it to the Bishop ; he is pretty hard hit, and I came out of his room last night, with a lump in my throat and something in my eyes that hadn’t been there for years.”

Lady Vivian drew herself up with quite a shocked air.

“ My dear Sir Edward,” she said reproachfully, “ I am the last person in the world, who would be likely to say a single

word to hurt the feelings of either of them. I felt, somehow, as I had the pleasure of introducing them to each other, that I was in a manner responsible for this engagement, and I am quite sure from what I know of dear Cecil, that she would never have acted like this without some very good and sufficient reason ; and I really came on this morning, as soon as I heard the news, that I might offer her my help. Possibly, after all it is only something that may be put right yet.

“It was very good of you,” said Sir Edward moodily, “and like your kind self to suggest that things may come right yet ; but I am afraid that is impossible. From what I can gather—they are both very reticent—but from what I can gather, Cecil broke off the engagement and the Bishop acquiesces without a murmur. They’re in love with each other yet, my lady, and as I said before, my girl’s breaking her heart

upstairs and he's breaking his heart in his Palace over yonder."

As a matter of fact, however, the Bishop was doing nothing of the kind. So far from sitting down to think over the inevitable, the unavoidable, he had gone down into Blankhampton, to hold his usual informal reception at his office; for he was always accessible to the clergy on a certain morning in the week, and had arranged for a room at his lawyer's office, in order that those coming from a distance might be spared the long walk or the expense of taking a cab to the Palace, which was about a mile and a half out of the town. It was an exceedingly painful duty, but he did not shirk it. And the worst of it was that they all knew. Those who had made a special point of coming in prospect of his two months' absence, were in turn warned by his secretary not to mention the subject.

“His Lordship is going away,” he said, to one after another, “and will be away two months, but the marriage is put off.”

“Definitely?” they all asked.

“That is more than I can tell you,” was guarded reply.

So as each clerical gentleman was shown into his presence, did the Bishop of Blankhampton realise that they had heard the latest Blankhampton news. No one, of course, uttered a single word even distantly bearing on the subject, no one so much as hinted at it in the most remote way, but the manner of each was unmistakeable, and the Bishop, suffering as he was, from the first sharp edge of the wound, was keenly alive to every glance, every tone, and even every thought that seemed to be passing through their several minds.

That over, which was about four o'clock, the Bishop took leave of his secretary and walked home. Not a single person

ventured to stop and exchange greetings with him, though it seemed to him as if he met everybody in the town, everybody in the neighbourhood ; and every single one who passed him by, felt a great throb of pity for him, and an equally strong feeling of indignation against the young lady, who had set that look of anxious pain upon the face of the most popular man in the whole county. The sentimental Maria, who was walking with a friend down St. Thomas's Street, had just heard the news, and the sight of the Bishop coming towering along, with his blanched haggard face—and he was a man whom pallor and haggardness did not improve, by any means—nearly fainted as she passed him by.

“Oh, I say, doesn't he look bad?” said Maria's friend. “Fancy his liking to go out.”

“I do not suppose he *liked* to come out,” said Maria, in a stifled voice, “but he

is not the sort of man that would shrink from a duty, however hard it was."

"I wonder why she broke it off?" her friend continued, not noticing Maria's agitation—"she must have had a reason. I wonder if she found out she wasn't fond enough of him, or what it was?"

"Oh, she was fond enough of him," said Maria.

"Do you think she was?"

"I am sure of it," said Maria, with conviction.

"Well, I don't know," said the other, "you never know, with ladies of her position, what they mean and what they don't. Everybody says she was only marrying him for his position and I should think if the truth be told, she has got a better catch on."

"That's as may be," said Maria sententiously.

"At all events, *she* isn't walking about,"

said Maria's friend, "I have been out twice to-day and I haven't seen her."

"She scarcely would be in any case," said Maria, with dignity.

Poor Cecil! At that very moment, she was sitting on the bank of the river, which divided her father's estate from that of his nearest neighbour, not weeping, no, her grief was too deep for that, but just sitting with her elbows on her knees, staring at the deep eddying river, which at that point was swift and dangerous. The Bend as they called that particular corner of the park, was considered one of the prettiest views in the neighbourhood. The sun was blazing overhead like a great diamond in a bed of turquoise, flowers dotted the bank as far as the eye could see, the birds were singing merrily, diminutive frogs were hopping restlessly about, and sly-looking water-voles whisked in and out of their earthy homes. To Cecil it was all blank.

Her faithful pug sat upon the tail of her gown, snorting as pugs do, and every now and again casting large-eyed glances towards her, as if he realised that she was in trouble. But Cecil was blind and deaf and dumb, filled only with a huge sense of utter misery, and feeling that the sword of Damocles had fallen, and that her life had come to an end, feeling that she had done with happiness in this world, and had not even the hope of either happiness or misery in a world to come.



CHAPTER X.

ALONE IN THE WORLD.

Life may change, but it may fly not ;
Hope may vanish, but can die not ;
Truth be veiled, but still it burneth ;
Love repulsed—but still returneth.

—SHELLEY.

There is no hope ; no ;—

—*Jeremiah.*

THE nine days' wonder died out as nine days' wonders generally do. After that time the good people of Blankhampton and Blankshire accepted the new order of things as best they could. In due course of time, all the guests invited to the wedding received Sir Edward's intimation that it would not take place. Gradually the presents were returned, but an

awkwardness arose about those which had been presented by the different tenants and households of the respective families, which would have been united by the marriage. The Raburn tenantry, indeed, created a precedent and settled the matter definitely, for a deputation waited upon Sir Edward and told him that there was a general feeling among the givers of the toilet-service, they would be deeply gratified if Miss Constable would honour them by accepting their gift, the broken off engagement notwithstanding.

“You see, Sir Edward,” said the principal speaker, “we all feel very strongly, that this present was given to Miss Constable as Miss Constable of Raburn, rather than to the future wife of the Bishop; and we feel equally sure that she had a good reason for breaking off her marriage, so that we should all like her to feel that we sympathise with her in what must be an exceedingly unpleasant situa-

tion. And, therefore, we hope that she will accept it and use it."

"Mr. Soames," said Sir Edward, "I will tell my daughter what you say. I am sure that she will be greatly pleased and honoured by this expression of your regard for her. It is a great sorrow to me that the marriage will not take place. My daughter is not well and therefore cannot see you and thank you for herself, but I will write to you to-night and tell you what she has to say in reply to your kindness."

"Very good, Sir Edward," replied Mr. Soames.

Of course in the face of such consideration as this, Cecil had no choice but to accept the beautiful service of silver, which was to have adorned her toilet-table, as the mistress of the Palace. She wrote a letter of thanks to Mr. Soames and directed Louise to pack the exquisite things up and

carry them down to Matthew that he might put them away in the strong room. She never thought of using the service, and if her father's good tenantry believed that she was several times a day reminded of their sympathy for her, why, they were mistaken, though they were none the worse for the kindly thought.

The example of the Raburn people was followed by the Netherby tenantry, and by all who had combined to give one thing from many. So these matters were disposed of and Blankhampton people got used to the idea that their Bishop was still, and was likely to remain, a bachelor.

During the fortnight which elapsed between the social convulsion, which shook all classes of society, and the original date fixed for the marriage, the Bishop went about his business exactly as he had done aforetime. It is true that the want of sleep and the presence of a crushing sorrow, had

set their unmistakeable mark upon him. He looked haggard and ill. He admitted to more than one that he was badly in need of rest and change, and on the evening of the 29th, he went away for an eight weeks' holiday, and Blankhampton people forgot to talk about him any more.

As for Cecil Constable, nobody saw her. Twice did Lady Vivian find her way to Raburn but Cecil would not, or at least did not see her. Then she wrote a friendly little note to her.

“MY DEAR CHILD,—

“Why will you not see me? Nothing is so bad for those in trouble as brooding over their sorrows. I am sure that you must be in trouble at this time, and it would unburden your mind if you talked it all over with me. For your sweet mother's sake, my child, let me come and see you. I think of you so often, so much,

and my heart *aches* for you, although I do not know the whys and wherefores of the new state of things.

“Always your affectionate friend,

“MARY VIVIAN.”

But Cecil was obdurate. Her answer went back by return of post:—

“DEAR LADY VIVIAN,” she said,

“God bless you. I cannot see anyone. The wound is too deep.

“Your grateful and affectionate

“CECIL.”

“Are you never going to see anyone again?” Sir Edward asked, when he realized that Cecil had denied herself to Lady Vivian for the second time.

“I do not know,” she answered, “not if I can help it.”

“But you cannot shut yourself up as if you were a nun in a cloister.”

“No, I know that, but it’s early days yet, Dad ; give me a little time to pull myself together in. It will have to come, I know ; and then she will ask me, in that kind purring pussy-cat way of hers, fifty questions that I cannot and will not answer. I shall have to go through it, I know, but every day that I can put it off, will make me feel it less.”

“Don’t you think that we had better go away ?” he asked.

“No—at least, not yet, dear ; we might go towards the end of September don’t you think ? And stay away—oh, till your hunting begins.”

“Oh, never mind my hunting ; that needn’t count. You would like to go away towards the end of September. Well, where shall we go ?”

“I don’t care — somewhere tolerably warm. If we go for a couple of months, that will put the time on.”

“Well, well, we can see about that when we get away,” he answered.

Eventually this was what they did. When the time drew near for the Bishop to return to Blankhampton, Sir Edward and Cecil went away, with a good deal of luggage, and attended by Badger and Louise. They went to Carlsbad first, and then moved about, staying a few days here or a week there, and returning home by way of North Italy. And by the middle of November, they found themselves once more at Raburn. This was by Cecil’s wish. Sir Edward, the least selfish of men, had pressed her very hard not to consider him or his hunting in any way.

“I can’t ride as I used to do,” he explained, “and I am not so gone on it as I used to be ; and in any case, you need not think about me, one way or the other. I am very happy where I am—I can make myself happy anywhere.”

“I would rather go back,” said Cecil, “oh, yes, dear, I would really much rather go back. I am getting to want to be at home again. You know, we found it so before. It is much nicer to be among our own people again, especially during the cold weather. At all events, we will go home for a little time—I would much rather.”

Somehow, Sir Edward got it into his head that she wanted to go home, because she had a hankering after the Bishop, and as, above all things, he still desired that the marriage should come about, he cheerfully acquiesced in what he believed to be her desire. Now, as a matter of fact, Cecil's only motive in suggesting that they should return home, was from a conscientious scruple that it was selfish of her to keep her father away from his beloved hunting, and from among his own people. For herself, she dreaded the return, more than words can express.

However, as often happens with things to which we have looked forward with great dread, the reality was less painful than she had feared. Everyone seemed very delighted to see her and, by tacit consent, nobody in any way approached the subject of her engagement to the Bishop; and, as her father was inexpressibly happy among his own people and occupied by his own pursuits, she was happy and thankful in the fact that she had forced herself to be strong enough to take what she had felt to be the right course.

They had been at home about three weeks, when she nerved herself to go and call upon Lady Vivian. I will not deny for a moment that it was an ordeal for the girl to face, for Lady Vivian was the one woman in Blankshire who could not be frozen or snubbed into silence, on the subject of her broken engagement. However, Cecil felt she must put a good

face on it and break the ice, so she drove over one afternoon, finding to her dismay, that Lady Vivian was at home. She followed the servant into the house with a sinking heart.

“This way, ma’am, if you please,” he said.

She knew the way much better than he did, for he happened to be a new footman who did not know her. The butler had gone to town on business for Sir Thomas, but had that solemn and important functionary himself been at home, it is probable that what happened next would not have happened, for, knowing who was with his mistress, he certainly would not have flung open the door of the boudoir to announce in stentorian tones — “Miss Constable.”

I think to her dying day Cecil Constable never forgot the supreme agony of that moment. There were five or six people

in the room and close to Lady Vivian sat the Bishop of Blankhampton. It is no exaggeration to say that Lady Vivian nearly died, indeed she was so scared, at this unexpected turn, that, although she rose and greeted Cecil with mechanical effusion, kissing her first on one cheek and then on the other, she had not the smallest idea of what she was really doing. There were two ladies in the room, wives of officers just come to the garrison, who did not know Cecil or the story of her affair with the Bishop. They therefore simply sat still and looked on. Cecil had advanced into the room too far to draw back, and in that moment she realized that however great the agony might be, she must still behave as if it were quite an ordinary occasion. She therefore spoke to the two other ladies, both of whom she knew ; and then turned to the Bishop and held out her hand to him.

It was the first time that they had seen each other since the dreadful day, following the evening, when the Bishop had preached that memorable sermon in Sparksworth Church. To the five pairs of eyes, eagerly watching the unhappy pair, who had hoped to be husband and wife by that time, they met with wonderful calmness and self-possession. It is true that Cecil Constable's voice died away in her throat, as she tried to utter some words of greeting to the man she loved with all her soul. And it is true that the Bishop's blue eyes were filled with indescribable agony. Still, they met as ordinary acquaintances, touched hands and even, in their confusion, sat down side by side upon the same couch. It happened that the Bishop had been the last to arrive of Lady Vivian's callers, so that he had no excuse, short of openly slighting Cecil, to cut the visit short.

"I did not know that you were back, Cecil," said Lady Vivian very kindly, yet with a suspicious nervousness in her tones.

"Have you been home long?"

"Some little time," said Cecil, conscious that everyone was hanging on her words.

"We came back for Father's hunting."

"And you have had a pleasant time away?"

"Oh, yes, we went to a good many places," she answered.

"You have not met Mrs. St. Maur," said Lady Vivian, indicating one of the two ladies whom Cecil did not know.

"No," said Cecil, "I think we have not met."

"Mrs. St. Maur and Mrs. Hattersley are both belonging to the new regiment," Lady Vivian explained.

Whereupon, Cecil bowed and the two ladies bowed, and Cecil murmured something indefinite about calling, and then the two ladies, all unknowing of the tragedy

which was being enacted under their very eyes, bade adieu to Lady Vivian, and betook themselves away.

Lady Vivian was more on tenter-hooks than ever. During the time that the two ladies were making their farewells, she perceived that Cecil and the Bishop were talking to each other. As a matter of fact he had turned abruptly towards her and was scanning her sad, lovely face with his own blue eyes more full of love than ever.

"Tell me," he said, in an undertone, "how are you?"

"I am alive, yes," she answered.

"You have been away a long time."

"Yes," she replied, "a long time, but I could not keep poor dear Father out of his hunting any longer. He did not want to come home but I felt that I should be happier if I knew that he was not kept away. He hates being abroad so—you know he does."

“I don’t blame him. You know,” he added abruptly, “you are looking very ill.”

“I am not ill,” she answered, “I eat and drink and do things pretty much as usual—I am not really ill. But you—how are you?”

“I? Oh, I am like you—I am alive; and that is about all I can say for myself.”

In the meantime, Lady Vivian had made a point of talking to her two other visitors, both of whom knew to the full the awkwardness of the situation, and pitied both the Bishop and Cecil with all their hearts. Therefore when Lady Vivian began an elaborate conversation, which was utterly at variance with everything that they had in their minds and hearts, or with what they had been talking of before, they took their cue from her and met her more than half way in her endeavours to smooth over the extreme awkwardness of the situation.

"You were asking me the other day," she said to one of them, "about my new chrysanthemums. I have only a few but they are in perfection just now ; would you like to see them ?"

"Oh, I should very much," the lady replied, understanding that Lady Vivian knew perfectly well that she cared no more about chrysanthemums than she did about cauliflowers, and that this was but an excuse to leave the two over there on the wide lounge together.

"Then come this way and I will show them to you. Oh, did you not know that I had a conservatory through the winter-garden ? Oh, yes, and it is in great beauty just now. We are going into the conservatory—I've got some new chrysanthemums," she said in a louder tone to Cecil. "You know the way."

"Oh yes, I will come too," said Cecil, rising at once.

But Lady Vivian did not wait for her. She had whisked her other two visitors through the door, leading into the winter garden and, finding that they were gone, the Bishop drew Cecil back on to her seat again.

“Don’t go,” he said reproachfully, “she doesn’t mean us to go, she doesn’t care anything about chrysanthemums and she knows that we don’t. Tell me—I have not seen you for ages—how is it with you?”

“Ill,” Cecil replied.

“Are things going no better—have you not changed your mind yet?”

“No,” she said shaking her head, “things are no better with me than they were then. I would have liked never to come back to Blankshire at all, but I could not keep poor Father away from his own people and from his beloved hunting any longer. He did not want to come, but I

felt it was so selfish, for my own sake, to keep him abroad any longer."

"There is no reason," said the Bishop, "why you should be exiled from your own people."

"I think the pain is less," said Cecil simply. "But it doesn't matter how I feel—I am indifferent about myself now. But you—tell me—how do you get on?"

"I am alive," repeated the Bishop—"I do my work and I eat and I go to bed and I get up in the morning."

"You went away," she said, in a shaking voice.

"Yes, I went away—I went to Switzerland—and I buried myself in a little Swiss village, quite off the beaten track. I thought about you a good deal."

"Yes—?" Her tone was very eager and invited him to go on.

"Why," he said, "you expected me to think about you, didn't you?"

A faint flush crept over her blanched cheeks.

“I don’t know—I didn’t know what you might be feeling about me. I did not know what you might be feeling against me.”

“Against you!” he echoed. He caught her hands with what was almost a cry. “Oh, my dear!” he exclaimed, “have you been thinking all these long weeks, that I left you that day in anger? Dearest, I was never angry with you in my life. Could I be angry? Could any man be angry, when a calamity so dire so unlooked-for and so stupendous, had fallen upon the woman he loved? Did you think I was such a fair-weather friend as that? Why, no. I gave you my love not on a lease but freehold for all time; that fate has come in to part us, makes no difference to my love for you. I shall love you, beyond all else in this world, to the very end of time. But I thought that you

understood that the blow had been as much as I could bear—I thought that you realised that.”

“No,” she said. “If I had not been the one to strike the blow, I might have realised it; as it was, I was afraid to think so. I should almost have been sorry to think so. I think that I would almost rather that you were angry with me. I believe it would make life easier to me to think so. And yet, I don’t know,” she added, “I don’t know.”

“I may come and see you?” he asked after a moment.

“I think not,” she said hesitatingly. “If I found that I had mistaken my mind, I would tell you at once; but, as it is, I can only tell you that it hurts less when I don’t see you. I have always the chance of meeting you, when I am out in the world—in this part of the world, at all events—and it is such agony to know that

every eye is watching us, every ear is open to catch each word that we let fall, that everyone is thinking about us and wondering and conjecturing—Oh, it is dreadful. I would so like to go away where nobody knows me.”

“But you don’t think,” he said anxiously, “that it would help you?”

“Not a bit,” she said, “not a bit. Nothing will help me. I have taken my fate into my own hands and I have been honest with you ; that is the only crumb of satisfaction that I have. For the rest, my whole life is a blackened waste, and the sooner it is over and I am no longer able to think, the happier for me. No, don’t come to see me—not yet, at all events. By-and-by, perhaps time will have blunted our feelings a little.”

“Do you think it ever will?” he asked in deepest reproach, and yet speaking very tenderly.

“No,” she cried, in a tone of sharp pain, “I don’t think so—I am sure that it never will. I will go home now—I wish I had not come—and yet, I am glad that I did.”

“And you will promise me, that you will send for me, if at any time, you feel the very smallest gleam of hope?” he said, taking her hands in his again.

“Oh, yes, need you ask me for such a promise? Don’t you *know* that I would?”

“And you will promise me, won’t you,” he continued, “that you will not shut yourself up in your blank unbelief, without trying to let the light in. If I may not come to see you, at least you will let me send you such books as I think will help you—you will come to hear me preach sometimes—you will go to hear others—you will not sit down with folded hands and say, ‘I will not even try to believe?’”

“No,” she said, “I will not do that, I will read anything that you send me. I

don't think I can bear to come and hear you preach ; I will try to do so, but the pain of it would be dreadful. You must not expect that of me—at least, not for a time. And now, I would really like to go home. I know what Lady Vivian is thinking—she is talking it over with those two women, and they are still admiring those wretched chrysanthemums ; and they will go in the other way and have tea in the hall at five. It is just five now, they always have tea in the hall at five— Couldn't you ring for the carriage ? ”

“ Of course, I could ; of course, I will. You have only to express a wish. Besides, Lady Vivian is very kind, she would not wish to wound you.”

“ Oh, no—I know. She is very kind, she is trying to help us, but she little thinks how impossible a task she has set herself. But you won't leave before me—ring for the carriage, and then we will go

and say good-bye and you can see me into it. That will prevent her asking any questions. You can order yours at the same time, if you want to avoid being cross-examined."

"Lady Vivian will not cross-examine me," said the Bishop.

"Oh, I don't know. Kind people who take an interest in their friends' business, are capable of anything. Yes, thank you," she said, as he rang the bell.

In a couple of minutes, the footman made his appearance again.

"Will you see if my carriage is round?" Cecil asked.

"And mine also," added the Bishop.

"Certainly, ma'am; yes, my lord. Tea is served in the hall, ma'am," he replied and disappeared.

"We will go out this way," said the Bishop, pointing towards the conservatory.

“We, too, had better look at the chrysanthemums.”

So they strolled through the winter-garden and the conservatories. I am afraid that neither of them looked at the beautiful white natural fringes of which Lady Vivian was so proud, but they strolled, with admirable unconcern, into the hall where the three ladies and a couple of men staying in the house, were assembled. They found afternoon tea was in full swing.

“A cup of tea?” said Cecil, “Oh, thank you, yes, Lady Vivian, I will have one.”

Lady Vivian poured it out and the Bishop took it to her, followed by one of the young men carrying a plate of muffins.

“Yes, I am very fond of muffins,” said Cecil, trying to speak lightly, “but I must take my glove off. I cannot bear eating in a glove.”

She was excited and flushed, and, as for the Bishop, he could not help all his love shining out of his honest eyes, so that Lady Vivian had quite an idea that her cleverness in making the way clear for them had smoothed the troubles of the affair quite away.

"You are not going, my dear?" she said presently, when Cecil rose to her feet and bade her good-bye. "Oh, but I have hardly seen you."

"I am afraid I must go," said Cecil, "I always like to be back when my father comes in; and besides, he has two men staying with him, so that I would rather get back. He will be uneasy about me. And our special tyrant William likes me to be in before the hunters come home."

"Well, of course, if you put it in that way, I must not attempt to keep you," said the lady of Ingleby kindly. "Perhaps the Bishop will see you into your carriage."

"I will with pleasure," said the Bishop,

in his most courtly manner, "and if you will excuse my running away, I will say good-bye also."

"Oh, I must not attempt to encroach upon *your* time. I think it is very good of you to come and see me at all--such a busy man as you must be. Then, good-bye, Bishop; good-bye, dear Cecil--come and see me again soon, dear."

"I will," said Cecil, "I will."

You may imagine how Lady Vivian and her visitors talked the situation over, when the two principal actors thereof had actually gone.

"What a lucky chance that they met here!" Lady Vivian exclaimed, "I don't believe they have met once since the engagement was broken off. Nobody ever knew why it was, and I know Cecil was heart-broken. Fancy their going away together like that! Did he go away in her carriage, I wonder?"

“ No, he did not,” said one of the men, “ I went out on purpose to see. He stood for ever so long at the carriage door, but he did not go back with her.”

“ Ah, well, of course, his home lies one way and hers another ; and people cannot break existing arrangements all in a moment. Very possibly he is dining out somewhere, and we know that Cecil had a reason for wishing to get home. At all events, I am thoroughly well-pleased that they happened to meet again, and that they met here.”



CHAPTER XI.

AMEN !

“ A sacred burden in this life ye bear ;
Look on it, lift it, bear it solemnly ;
Stand up, and walk beneath it, steadfastly.”

—KEBLE.

“ And her gates shall lament and mourn : and she,
being desolate, shall sit upon the ground.”

—*Isaiah.*

BUT although the old city of Blankhampton and the surrounding neighbourhood rang for a week or more, with rumours that the marriage between the Bishop and Miss Constable would come off after all, the interested spectators of the drama received no confirmation of the truth of such a report ; and, like many other such whis-

pers, it died out without anything definite coming of it.

So time went on. Once more Spring flowers bloomed and faded, golden summer shed her radiance and her fragrance on the earth; tender autumn came in, and more than a year had gone by, since the Bishop and Cecil had parted hands. They had only met once again since that day when they had met in Lady Vivian's drawing-room, and then they had not foregathered. Indeed, it had been an occasion on which it would not have been easy for them to do so. But although to the Bishop, this chance meeting had been as balm in Gilead, it is no use disguising the fact that, to Cecil Constable, it gave only untold agony. Naturally they had never met at dinner anywhere, as nobody had thought of asking them on the same evening.

She had kept her promise to him in one way, inasmuch as she had read many

times over every line that he had sent her. She had also listened to many sermons, but she had never yet been present when the Bishop himself was the preacher.

In September the Bishop went away for his annual holiday but, this year, he did not go to Switzerland for that change and rest, which were doubly indispensable to him in his disappointed and saddened life. Instead he went to Southampton and there embarked on a friend's yacht and, together with three other men, went off for a long cruise, including Norway, Iceland and the Faroe Isles; and when he returned home to Blankhampton Palace, he learnt that Sir Edward Constable and his daughter had gone abroad.

November came and went. Hunting was in full swing but Sir Edward Constable did not return to take any part in it. The Bishop heard from Lady Vivian, that they were spending the winter at San Remo,

and also that the doctors had absolutely forbidden Sir Edward to run the risk of spending any portion of the winter in England, and that Cecil wrote in much depression about him, and seemed terribly anxious and ill at ease. Indeed, she showed him the letter which she had received that morning from Cecil.

“Dear father is very much more unwell than he thinks or will admit for a moment. He has suddenly turned quite white and looks to me very shrunken and thin. He is continually having attacks of bronchitis, indeed they always seem to follow the smallest over-exertion, and I cannot get him to take any care of himself. If it were not for Badger and Louise, I really don't know what I should do. The worst of it is that he hates this place and abominates the cooking, finding fault with everything, and contrasting it with the

comforts of Raburn. I wanted to move to Nice, which I thought would be more cheerful, but Sir Henry Mallam, who has been here to visit the Archduchess Marie, saw him and absolutely forbade our even thinking of it, so here I suppose we shall remain until the winter is over. And it is now only the middle of December. You don't know how I dread the next three or four months, but as soon as ever the east winds are gone, we shall go home at once."

"I am afraid," said Lady Vivian, in her kindly tones, "that things are going very hardly with our old friends. I am very sorry for Cecil. You see, Bishop, she is alone in the world. They have practically no relations, she is really the last of the Constables; and what would happen to her if Sir Edward were to die, I cannot think. And I had so hoped," she went on,

not looking at him, but assiduously contemplating the silken sock that was quickly growing under her deft fingers, "I had so hoped that things would be so very different for her."

However, if Lady Vivian had any idea that she was about to draw any confidence out of the Bishop, she was mistaken. He got up at once.

"I am very sorry. I have a very great regard for Sir Edward. Your news has grieved very much," he said, letting the question of the might have been pass unnoticed. "But we can only hope for the best, these matters are in higher hands than ours. I can only hope that, if the worst comes, Miss Constable will be sustained in such a grievous affliction."

He put out his hand and bad her good-bye, without giving her any chance of, so to speak, probing his wound again and,

almost before she realised he was taking leave of her, he had gone.

“I believe,” said Lady Vivian to herself, letting the silken sock fall upon her knee, “I believe that it was *he* who broke off the engagement. Poor Cecil!”

That night the Bishop wrote to Miss Constable, telling her how grieved he was at what he had heard, and asking her if there was anything he could do to help her at this time? The letter was such an one as any Bishop might write to any unimportant person in his diocese; but Cecil received it, read it, kissed it and wept over it, realizing in every word what to an ordinary person, would have conveyed nothing. Her answer came back in a few days and was brief enough.

“Your letter has been a great comfort to me,” she began without prefix, “it is no use pretending to you that I do not know what

is coming upon me. My father is dying. He gets up, he even goes out, but although the doctors will say nothing definite, I know that the end will not be far off. I am very unhappy and am utterly alone. Pray for me, for I cannot pray for myself.

“Your CECIL.”

And so the weeks crept by. At the end of February, the news came to Raburn that Sir Edward Constable was dead. The good people of Blankshire very soon learned all that there was to know of the popular baronet's last hours. The local papers stated that the death had been comparatively sudden, that although Sir Edward had been in failing health for some months, yet till within a week of his death, he had been able to drive out every day, and usually to take walking exercise also. Some slight imprudence in staying out half-an-hour longer than usual had brought

on a severe attack of bronchitis, under which he had rapidly succumbed. The notices also stated that Mr. Alderton, Sir Edward's agent, and Mr. Scott, the family lawyer, had immediately on receipt of the news started for San Remo. Also that Sir Edward would be brought home and be laid beside his wife in Raburn churchyard.

It was a terrible week for Cecil Constable. She travelled home with Louise and Badger, leaving the agent and the lawyer to escort the precious remains of her dead father. It was a terrible home-coming. To feel that she was alone in that great, echoing, silent house ; to feel that so long as she lived, she would always be alone in it ; to feel that she was absolutely alone in the world, mistress of that great estate, and with only such comfort as could be found in the thought of a broken past, a sorrowful present and a perfectly hopeless future.

And all day long people streamed up and down the avenue at Raburn, leaving cards and messages of condolence, and many beautiful flowers in affectionate remembrance of him who was gone from among them. Indeed, by the time the coffin arrived the great library, which had been made into a *chapelle ardente*, was all alight with those lovely tokens, and the air was heavy and sick with their perfume. Among other callers came the Bishop, who had never passed under the great elms, since that bright July day when he and Cecil had parted, now a year and a half ago. The estimable Matthew, who was himself in dire distress at the death of his adored master, could not help noticing how changed and aged he was.

“Miss Constable has taken it to heart very much, my lord,” he said. “You see, Sir Edward and she thought a deal of

each other, and it's only natural she should feel it now he has gone."

"Very natural," said the Bishop, "quite natural. And you will give her this note, Matthew, won't you?"

"I will, my lord," said Matthew, taking the note as if it were something that would melt in his grasp.

"I assure you, Mrs. Pincher," he said to the cook, a few minutes later, "that his lordship looks a good ten years older than he did the last time he came to Raburn."

"I never understood that break-off," said Mrs. Pincher. "And neither did poor Sir Edward, I'm quite sure of that, from what he said to me."

"What did he say to you?" Matthew demanded.

"Well, I never told," said Mrs. Pincher, "it's not my habit to go blabbing round over every bit of information that comes

to me. But, as a matter of fact—it doesn't matter now, though I don't expect this to be repeated, Matthew—but, as a matter of fact, I was taking a look round at the currant bushes one day, for Timmins informed me that there weren't enough red currants for me to start on my jelly, so I took a look round to satisfy myself on that point. I made a fifty pounds of jelly that week," she added, "but that's neither here nor there, Matthew. Well, whilst I was strolling round the garden who should I meet but Sir Edward. 'Ah, Mrs. Pincher, he said, 'are you looking after your currants?' 'I am, Sir Edward,' said I, 'and I must say, I think there's a fair tidy show.' And then, you know how free and easy he was, in his own 'igh and 'aughty way, Sir Edward he got talking first about one thing and then about another; and then, he says, 'Ah, Mrs. Pincher,' says he, 'I had hoped things would be different.'

‘Well, Sir Edward,’ says I, ‘they would have been different, if my lord and my young lady ’adn’t changed their minds.’ ‘As far as I can make out, Mrs. Pincher,’ says he, ‘they’ve neither of them changed their minds at all; and that,’ says he, ‘is the infernal mystery of it.’ And now, I ask you, Matthew,” Mrs. Pincher continued, “if neither of them had changed their minds, why didn’t the wedding come off?”

“That’s more than I can tell,” Mrs. Pincher,” said Matthew, “but it don’t look to me as if it was coming off now. It don’t look to me as if there’d ever be any wedding at Raburn, and what our young Miss will do in this great house all by herself, I can’t think — I don’t like to think.”

“She isn’t ‘our young Miss’ now,” said Mrs. Pincher, with a prodigious sigh. “But I’m sure, poor young lady, my ’eart bleeds for her.”

Then there came the dreadful day of the funeral, when the Bishop and the old Rector took the service between them, when people came from far and wide to do honour to the last of the Constables, not counting, of course, Cecil herself.

After this Cecil remained alone at Raburn for more than three months. It was very bad for her, but she obstinately refused to take any advice on the subject.

"I have lived at Raburn all my life," she said, in answer to an expostulation of Lady Lucifer, "and it's not a bit more dull to me than any other place would be. It's awfully kind of you, Violet, to ask me to come and stay with you, but yours is a gay house and I'm not fit for gaiety just now. I would rather be alone with my sorrow. By and by, I shall have got used to it, and then, I suppose, I shall have to go out into the world again. But for the present there is no place to me like my home."

"But my dear child," Lady Lucifer cried, "how can you bear to live in this great rambling house all by yourself?"

"I have always lived in it," said Cecil.

"I know you have always lived in it—but you've not lived in it alone."

"I have got to live here alone now," the girl cried in trembling tones.

"Well, my dear, I've not come here to upset you, Heaven knows I think of you continually, and I'm sure, Cecil nobody was so sorry as I was, when your engagement to the Bishop was broken off. Don't think dear, I'm saying this to upset you or to touch upon any wound but, of course, nobody understood why it was."

"I know that," Cecil murmured.

"I never like to speak about it and I never liked to even hint at it before, but I thought it was just possible that the Bishop might have——"

"Jilted me," suggested Cecil.

“Well, I wasn’t going to put it in that way, but he might have felt he had made a mistake or something of that kind. Still, the day your poor father was buried, I was standing behind you, Cecil, and I saw him look at you, as he was turning away from the graveside, and I knew in a moment that it had not been his doing.”

“Oh, don’t,” Cecil cried, “*don’t*. Try not to think about it—it doesn’t matter whether he or I broke it off—it must be all the same to the world. There was not any case of jilting about it, one side or the other. We decided that we would not marry, and that is as much as the world need know or ought to know. But don’t talk about it, and don’t press me to come and stay with you, Violet—I can’t. You must not expect it—you must not ask it. And don’t worry about my being here alone. I’m not more unhappy or sad or miserable here than I should be anywhere else ; and

I should be miserable if you put me down in the midst of a crowd."

So Lady Lucifer was obliged to leave the matter, and so everybody who ventured to touch upon it was also constrained to do. And the cold and cheerless spring passed over and every day Cecil grew more pale and wan ; and every day the Bishop seemed to look older and graver, until it was patent to all interested beholders, that these two were breaking their hearts for each other, although there was apparently no reasonable bar to their marriage.

During all this time, Cecil had never heard the Bishop preach, since that fateful sermon in Sparksworth Church. She had duly and truly sought for light but, with every day, her unbelief had been confirmed, rather than helped and dispelled. The more she read, and the more she heard, the less did she seem able to accept those old teachings, which have lasted for so

many centuries. The more she read, and the more she heard, the more convinced was she that the pieces did not fit, that the whole thing was a fallacy, and that there was no foundation of truth in it whatever.

The events of the two past years had changed the Bishop, quite as much as they had changed Cecil. When first he became Bishop of Blankhampton, there had been only one thing in any sense against him, which was that people had told each other that although the matter of his sermons was good, the manner of them left much to be desired. But in that he was greatly changed. From the time of his broken engagement, although he had never seen Cecil in any of the many churches at which he had preached, he was in imagination, always trying to recall that lost soul, so infinitely and so unspeakably precious to him. From being a plain, practical preacher of the Broad-church type, he had

gradually become more argumentative, more doctrinal, very persuasive and, at times, highly impassioned.

“It seems,” said one of his hearers one day, after a most fervent discourse on the difficulties and the beauties of faith, “it seems as if the Bishop’s disappointment has made him throw himself with more heart and soul into his work, even than he did to begin with. Upon my word, he preached to-night as if someone he loved was on the brink of stepping into hell, and only his eloquence could save him.”

“*Her*, more likely,” returned the other drily.

“I suppose Miss Constable is all right in that respect?” said the first speaker.

“Oh, yes. The Constables have always been particularly pious people, and she is far more so than ever Sir Edward was. She is very devout—I see her about continually at different churches. Oh, it’s not that.”

“I wonder what it was.”

“My dear chap, that’s what we shall never know—never. It is one of the mysteries of what we call life. But, upon my word, it has pulled both of them completely to pieces ; they have never looked the same since, either of them.”

“And he buried Sir Edward—that was so queer.”

“Well, Sir Edward thought a lot of him, you know. Sir Edward was awfully disappointed when the marriage did not come off. By the bye, you know that Canon Verulam is going to preach on Sunday at the Parish?”

“Yes—yes, I heard it.”

“Shall you go?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“He is going to stay at the Palace.”

“Oh, is he? Yes, I think I shall go and hear him ; I’ve never heard him.”

Well, naturally enough, the following

Sunday drew a vast crowd to the morning service in the choir of the Parish, a crowd of people eager and anxious to hear a man, who was called by many, "the modern Savonarola" — the most impassioned preacher of modern times. Among them was Cecil Constable, who was in her accustomed place in the second row of the stalls, close to the pulpit and immediately opposite to the Bishop's throne. In due time, the organ began to play, and the choir and clergy to pass slowly into the church. And the last of that long white-robed procession was the Bishop of the diocese, whose dignified head towered above all others. Cecil's heart gave a great throb, as he passed before her on his way to the episcopal throne, and prevented her from perceiving that there was no unusual figure in the procession. She never gave a thought to the preacher, until the time came for the sermon. She had

scrupulously avoided looking up during the service, until she heard the well-known tones speaking from the throne opposite.

"I stand here to-day," he said, "in the place of the most eloquent preacher to whom it has ever been my lot to listen, feeling myself a poor substitute for him, but trusting that you will bear with me, when I tell you that he, who should have spoken this morning, received an urgent message, summoning him, to what, I fear, is the dying bed of a near and dear relative. In this affliction, I would ask for your prayers for him." Then he gave out his text.

"Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

Surely, if eloquence and impassioned utterance were the qualities for which the preacher, who should have enchained the

attention of that congregation, was renowned, the people lacked nothing because of their Bishop being substituted for him. Never was a sermon so passionately pathetic, poured out on human ears before. The congregation was electrified, and Cecil Constable sat with her great eyes fixed upon him, her face strained with eager attention, her lips a little apart, but with that same terrible *seeking* look upon her face, which had first attracted him towards her.

“Cast aside your faith, break down the beliefs of your childhood, and what have you left? Nothing — nothing — nothing. Oh, it is so easy, so fatally easy to find fault—even with God Almighty, who made you. It is so fascinating to take up an attitude which asks for proof. ‘Give me proof and I will believe,’ cries the soul which has belief in nothing! It is so fascinating to be wiser than our fathers, to regard old faiths as fables, old

beliefs as mere nurses' tales, food for babies, but not for strong men! It is so easy to pull down, so hard to build up! One weak soul may undo in a single day, what has taken centuries of faith to put together. There is *no work* so easy as the work of the iconoclast, no work so pitifully easy as that of finding fault, of picking holes, of pointing out the joints in the harness, the flaws in the jewels of God. But—I would ask of you to pause and reflect for a moment! There are those of little or no faith, who take away one stand-point after another, who refute this, who cannot accept that. And when such an one has taken *all*—what have you left? Nothing—nothing—nothing! Then, with no faith, with no belief in that divine personality, which has carried men and women through the baptism of fire or, by the long divorce of steel, to the Heaven of the Saints, what is left to the unbeliever

to make this poor life of ours worth living? I say to you—nothing, nothing! A few short years of struggle and strife, of disappointment, and care and sorrow, of growing infirmities or of sharper bodily pains, and then — what? Nothing — nothing! No hope, no recompense, only the blank silence of the grave! And yet, O, ye of little faith—you can coldly ask for proof, before you will accept the divine story of Christ's love. I say to you that if you could prove, beyond all shadow of doubt, that there is as little truth in the story of the gospel as you now believe, that you would do a cruel act in putting that proof about. If we Christians, the humble believers and followers of Christ, are all wrong, if the whole story is a fable and a fallacy, we are yet happier and richer and more blessed in our faith, than those who have no faith, those who must have proof, cold, material proof, before

they can accept what is their best, truest, deepest interest to accept. I say, if the believing Christian is wrong in his belief, the belief which will carry him over a life-time of trouble and adversity, if there is, as the Agnostics or the Atheists say, an end of all things human, when death has laid his finger upon our weary eyes, I still say the Christian has the best of it. He has at least pressed forward to a high ideal, he has had before him the model of a life which even Atheists admit to be perfect, he has hoped for, striven after and struggled for a higher and a nobler life than any other on this earth, and even if there is nothing beyond the grave, he is more blest in his blind belief, his blind faith, than the unbeliever to whom life is an assured span, death an assured blank."

During the early part of the service, the May sunshine had been streaming through the windows but, during the sermon, a

storm broke over the great edifice. Those in the choir never forgot the scene. The pitiless rain beating hard upon the roof, beating hard against the great windows, and otherwise a dead silence, only broken by the voice of the Bishop, pouring forth one impassioned, pleading sentence after another, and ending with outstretched arms—"Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent to thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye say Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Across the crowd of men and women, two souls stood face to face, two hearts lay bare, one before the other—the palpitating, bleeding, passionate, eager heart of the

one, and the crushed, aching, hopeless, despairing, lonely heart of the other. And between them lay the unbridgeable, impassable, bottomless gulf of Fate—the cruel fate which had made the one mind see in religion all that was living, loving and beautiful, all that was satisfying, sustaining and comforting ; the fate which had given to the other only the hunger which no spiritual food could feed, a mind which could take nothing, nothing on trust, a mind in which practical reasoning was unhappily carried to such excess, that the pieces never seemed to fit ; a mind which could accept nothing, believe nothing, hope for nothing ; a soul torn by a thousand passions, wholly unable to believe in the one thing, which would have made the way clear for earthly happiness, and the hope of happiness in the world to come.

So they stood, this man and this woman,

who loved each other beyond all the world, who loved each other for time and for eternity and who yet were utterly and irrevocably apart for ever. . . . So they stood, the Bishop with eyes and head and heart on fire, wrestling with God and Satan both for the light to be let in on this one precious soul, striving for some way to be opened out before her doubting eyes, the eyes which could not see even a single foot of the road. And she, hope all dead, life all blasted, love starved, and heart desolate though so full, gave up from that moment even the one little thread of joy in loving him which had seemed to keep her woman's heart alive.

Then the Bishop uttered the words which gave the glory of his heart's agony to God above ; and the choir chanted Amen !

THE END.

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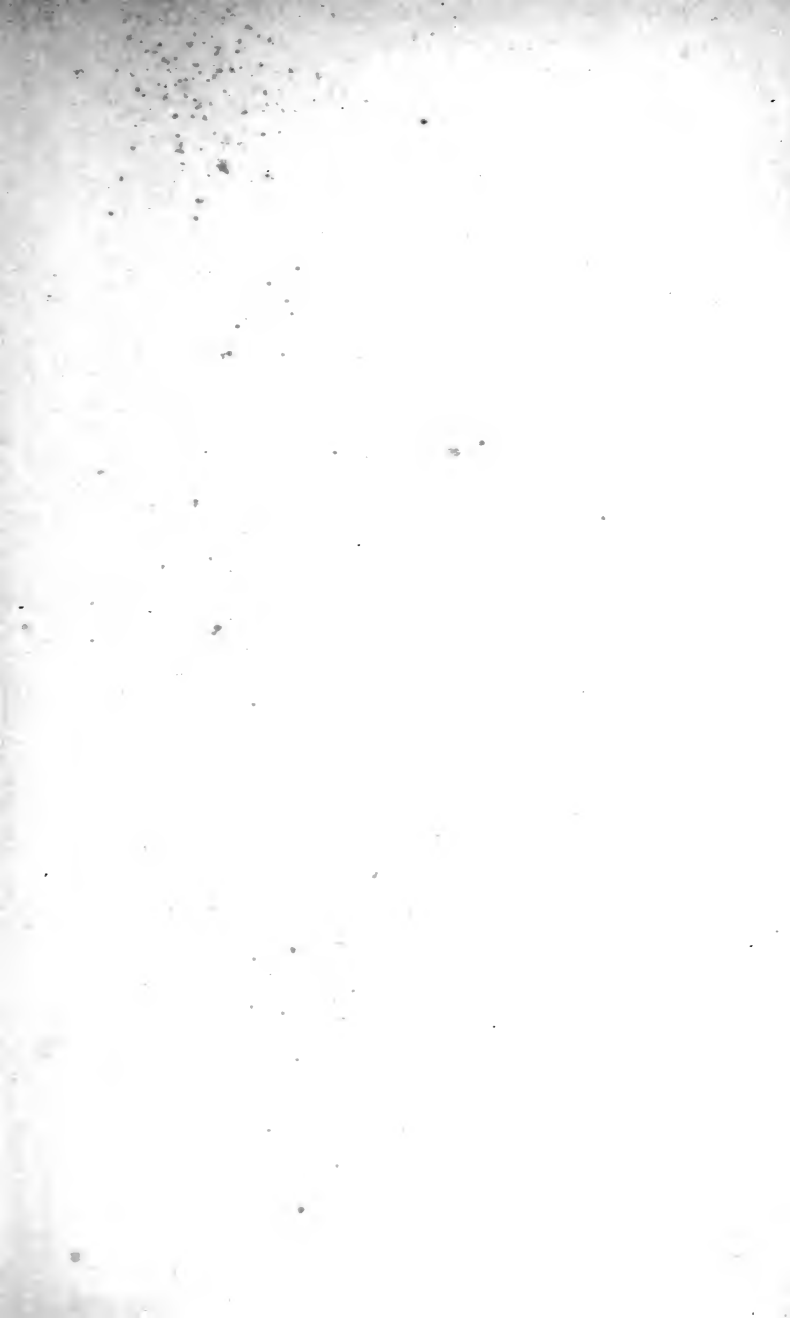
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